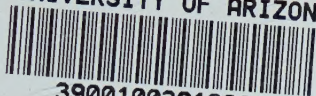


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HORSES & REDES

BY REMY-DE-GOURMONT





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# THE HORSES OF DIOMEDES

By REMY DE GOURMONT

Translation by C. SARTORIS

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1923

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BOSTON

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# "THE HORSES OF DIOMEDES"

## CHAPTER I

### ROSES

*The ideal fragrance of roses which will  
never be gathered*

THIS hermit's hut with its thatched and perhaps reeded roof, with its wattle door and its mud walls and the death's head in a corner and the pitcher. Ah, but the joy of being alone, and the silence, and to have crushed desire under one's bare foot!

"There were times when one rushed to the desert. Returning, after having chastened a few unmanageable Slavs, the surprised soldiers would meet a pilgrim going to kneel in the solitude of newly made devastation, and to plant the rampart of a wooden cross between Rome and the bar-

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barian. The one would start, still intoxicated with the fragrance of a rose too passionately inhaled, and when night came would throw himself on a heap of dead leaves; the other, haunted and troubled by the acrid perfume of deceased philosophies, would fashion his last sandals out of the ‘Enneades’ scroll and would forever close his heart and eyes to intellectual luxuries; again the other, who had been cruel, would before fleeing kiss the hands of his tortured slaves. All scourged themselves according to their sin, but they had sinned first in loving life too well and they were now destined to cherish only phantoms and to smile only on the invisible.

“Those were Christians. Paganism also had its hermits whose proud minds isolated them from the rest of mankind, magnificent egoists tired at last of sharing vulgarised pleasures with the ordinary; fragile sensitives, wounded three times a day by the rude touch of uncouth bestiality; contemptuous, who, weary even of their contempt for human mediocrity, would essay to worship

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the trees and perhaps, following the commandment of Pythagoras, to adore the sacred whisperings of the tempests.

“And all would away, parched with the same thirst, urged toward the same fountain-head, the fountain which springs forth but in the cells or amidst the rocks under the powerful spell of solitude, and, having denied social contingencies, they would drain the divine.

“To be a man, that is to say a participant of the infinite, one must abjure all fraternal conformities and wish oneself special, unique, absolute. Those alone will be saved who save themselves from amidst the multitude. . . .”

At this point in his meditation, Diomedes was interrupted by the chime striking the hour of one.

Christine was coming.

Ever since he had cut himself off from pleasure that had turned to nothing, annihilating himself almost, remaining prostrate by the side of the road, he had wished to divert himself with the smile of passers-

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by. This one was frail, mute and luminous. She would enter like a glance, as if gliding through the chink of the door and would move with no more noise than was made by her reflected grace in the mirror. Neither love, nor slight disrobings—whether by his hand or by his look—nor his apparent kisses upon her throat, nor the ambiguous prayers—no—nothing of these reassured and nothing troubled the clearness of her wondering eyes, eyes like those which hailed the angelic visitation, but without faith, and passive. Each time she came, Diomedes heard inwardly this old-time verse of which nothing in Christine justified the evocation except perhaps a remote air of immolation:

“The sobs mingled with the cries of dying victims.”

Silence and sudden night were the adorable witnesses to the sacrifice.

She was a very comely young woman of wholly Christian chasteness, but curiously attired and suddenly half-clothed. Her beauty was candid and quiet, nun-like, and aristocratic.

Diomedes dreamt her to be one of those

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noble women who timorously, but without blushing, would extend a rope ladder to their lover over the wall of the cloister. Stories nearly all of them tragical and so rarely gallant. Her rule, in the old days, would have been to love without a word, to pursue her love in defiance of the world, and to give account to God alone of the use she made of her life. Moreover, she was candid and happy in the depth of her heart, although with a happiness in which no one, and especially her lovers, would be the confidant.

Her fidelities lasted several months, one whole season, summer loves, winter loves; then Diomedes would not see her perhaps for more than a year, for she had revolutions like the stars and omissions like the comets.

Without doubt her golden hair, to eyes that wept for her, had but once appeared in the heavens.

Christine was coming, to enter like a glance through the chink of the door.

She did not come.



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Diomedes was grieved.

Some hours passed. Numbed by the torture of waiting, he had little by little taken up his meditation. Disappointed and dejected, he soon found himself irritated with the want of perspicacity of his desire and once again envious of the state of wisdom of those who have abolished in their souls all worldly lust, so that they would have been able to inhale, in silence, the beauty of the chaste Christine.

He reopened at the forsaken page the second volume of the *Lives of the Hermits of the Occident* and carefully unfolded the plan of the monastery and of the desert of the monks of the Camaldulian order. This extinct order by the mere fact of its non-existence fascinated him especially. Thus it came to pass, said the book, “within a precipitous and cragged mountain, difficult of access; one descends as through a precipice towards a vale where was built the monastery of Camaldoli; from this monastery each day all that is necessary is sent to the hermits. Between the monastery

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in the valley and the hermitage at the top of the mountain it is an hour and a quarter's walk and one meets on the road numbers of green trees and several torrents which one must pass over. This mountain is all covered with a dark wood of large firs which give out the most excellent odour, and as these trees always retain their leaves and their greenness, they form in the midst of the forest a shaded haven and the most beautiful retreat in the world, continuously watered by seven fountains with pure and clear streams, and the effect is very agreeable . . .”

He shut his eyes a moment, awaiting the presence of his friend; then he read over this verdant page. “Very agreeable. . . . Truly, very agreeable,” and he thought dreamily that by well chosen readings, and by slow meditation upon them, one might re-create one's life with an almost wanton facility.

“The man of action is but a digger; the meanest narrator stirs up more life than a conqueror, and moreover if speech is not

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everything nothing exists without speech; it is at once the leaven, the salt, and the form. Speech is perhaps to the human gesture what the sun is to the earth, the exterior principle of formal disparity, the absolute condition of vital movement. A very few only, and without gain or joy to themselves, can transform directly the acts of others into their own personal thoughts; the multitude of men think but thoughts already emitted, feel but feelings already used up and but sensations as faded as old gloves. When a new word reaches its destination, it arrives like those postcards which have gone around the world and on which the handwriting is dying, obliterated by blots and stains, but, enigma or untruth, it is nevertheless the great creator perhaps of everything, and a pleasant creator, indeed very pleasant, on days when one waits for a Christine at the hour when desire, having vanished, leaves you with an open wound in your heart.

“No doubt the Camaldulians were poor people with insipid, weary, and dull souls.

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To be one of them, what loathing! But to read their tales or histories gives me an hour's peace—and I dream with delight of the contempt which the intellectual herd and the sentimental masses have for such candid pleasures.”

He resumed:

“This exceeds somewhat my present thought. . . .”

He was at that moment thinking of Pascase, so gentle and sensitive, without his nervous brutality, and by whom he felt himself loved with a proud timidity.

“Perhaps he will pass. I will make signs to him.”

Pascase went out at any moment, and returned as quickly. A strange muscular agitation gave him the demeanour of a restless dog of whom it is impossible to know whether he seeks his mate, a bone, or nothing. He walked with his eyes uplifted, and Diomedes had but to knock lightly on the pane.

—I did not dare, said Pascase. Yesterday you told me your dear Christine. . . .

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—Christine is not dear to me, answered Diomedes, she is agreeable to me. As words have not an identical meaning for us, I must be precise in using your language. Christine is agreeable to me by her form, her grace, her discretion, her pallor and that is all. Moreover she did not come.

— And it is the same to you?

— Now, yes. An hour ago I suffered from it. I suffered through my own fault. I alone can make myself suffer. I stab myself. Other knives have no affinity with my flesh. Christine comes or does not come. She did not come: at this moment it is as if she had gone. Perhaps I had not desired her presence ardently enough? There are days when souls revolve as aimlessly as an ailing compass, they cannot get in touch, and our desires, even our mutual desires, burst in mid-air and vanish as small rockets — rather foolishly.

Pascase was still thinking of the words “gone or not come”; he said:

— It is not the same thing.

— What? Desires and rockets?



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— What rockets? Diomedes, how difficult it is to follow your thought. I said: Gone and not come are very different. It is yes and no.

— Pascase, my dear friend, when yes and no are said in the past their meaning is equally void, they are lost in nothingness.

— But having come, you would now still have on your hands, eyes and lips the sensation of a real remembrance, of an evident joy. The scent of roses lives where roses have flowered.

— You are pleased with your phrase. It is charming.

— I say what I think.

Diomedes did not answer. He could not, without wounding him, explain to a friend of Pascase's character his plausible habits of language. Smiling, he resumed:

— Why do you believe in the existence of Christine? Have you seen her?

— Never. And I would not wish to see her. She frightens me. If I saw her I would love her. Do not let me see her ever, ever! . . .

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He had risen, excited, hustling the carpets, tearing with mad fingers at a fan which lay on a table.

—She did come! Here is her fan. I recognize it. It smells of the fragrance which must be hers, the fragrance of roses, the ideal fragrance of roses which will never be gathered. Would I be afraid if I did not feel her to be alive and tempting? This room is filled with her; I did wrong to come here. If I loved her I could contain myself no longer. She would hold me, she would cling to me, she would suffocate me in her arms fragrant with the scent of dying roses. . . . I am afraid. I fear her. . . .

He was silent, having taken refuge in a corner, shamefaced, leaning over one of the pictures, butterflies nailed to the wall. Then Diomedes, whom such outbursts could neither surprise nor move, said softly:

—Pascase, tender and brave heart, why not have a mistress, a real mistress? I have several. . . .

—What, you deceive her? Her!

—We do not quite understand each

## “THE · HORSES · OF · DIOMEDES”

other, resumed Diomedes, smiling in friendly manner, and the fault rests, I think, with your somewhat old-fashioned vocabulary. Women, flowers on hedges, belong to those who gather them. Let them, women, better endowed than briar-roses, wave the warning of their thorns if they do not wish to be plucked. Before giving themselves they are free, and having given themselves they are still free. I have Christine: take her, but how will you? Besides which, you fear her. Let us leave dreams. I have Fanette, a thoughtless child, fair-haired and refined, whom I love for the freshness of her soul, but Fanette has innumerable lovers. Where would she learn love? One learns love! Will you have Fanette? She is gentle, she will fascinate you. I have Mauve: but Mauve has tasted at many clusters of grapes. Her vine is a forest of vine-plants with viridescent foliage, with fruits of all flavours; sweet or tart, the bird plunders and drinks, its beak uplifted to heaven in such exquisite ecstasy. Love her, love the amusing Mauve, she is russet as a chestnut.

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No? Not? Take Cyrène, illustrious woman whom Cyran adored. Since then, he has had his soul anointed, according to the rites, with the most powerful penitential oils, but Cyrène is ready for virtue, they will love each other again perhaps, through ennui, pity, exhaustion. . . . I do not know what to suggest to you, I am very fond of Cyran. It would merely please me to thwart destinies and with a word to wipe out writings which the senile hands of celebrated planets formulate in the astrological heavens. . . . Cyrène is so many things; first of all a weeping willow, and the most hospitable; one sits under it in a ring, and one picnics. Sensitive heart of a tainted sentimentalist! She was so truly made not to write and to be the veiled bountiful lady who steps from her carriage in the midst of the slums, throws a purse to the poor widow and disappears in a cloud of love, the bountiful lady who is generous because her wants are satisfied. I have never found the slightest logic except in trashy novels. . . . At last she is

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bored, she told me so. She waits. Of real ennui, sacred ennui, great ennui, she is naturally incapable. Ah! the disquietude of living, the ignorance of everything, our speechlessness before the incessant questions of the unknown force that lives, throbs and sings within us! Answer it? First of all know it. Perhaps before anything seek it? Do we really seek it and in good faith? What is its name? Its name is We, its name is I. I have men and women, friends and mistresses, a broad and free life; what fails me is I. Sometimes I seek and, miraculously, sometimes I find myself, then I flee from myself. It is absurd, yes, but I have a leaning towards the absurd; a sapling leans towards the saddened greenish water of an obscure pond. There is dread in our souls and in our heads the vertigo of currents and falls.

Trees, plants, grasses of today, you, I and all, we are uprooted beings, rafts, skiffs, or vessels carried towards the unknown ocean by the brutal and imperious stream which has conquered the forest. It



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carries us all, standing still upright, as the native soil, with our leaves whispering in the wind, our birds, our insects, all our familiar creatures: and that is why we believe we live, but that spring will come no more. No, it is too grand for our mediocrity. It is merely question of a poor tuft of moss that feeds no more on earth but only on a little damp air, or perhaps of a wall-flower which freezes on the ridge of an old wall. I belong no more to spontaneous woods or to well-ordered gardens, I experience no fraternal pleasures, I am alone. How alone we are, my friend! Alone and abandoned, stripped in the midst of a hostile world and forsaken even by God. God rules no more; it is the interreign of the infinite. Therefore our salvation is in us, absolutely; as it has been said, we must seek and find ourselves and learn not to fear ourselves and to look bravely into the greenish cold waters of the sad and obscure pond. There, I always know exactly what I wish to say, and from image to image, as at the relays one changes one's horses but

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not one's course, I arrive at the inn. Ah yes, to lie down and sleep! Thought is an illness which causes sleep to flee. Tomorrow I will go and see Fanette. That is quite amusing.

Once more alone, Pascase having hardly closed the door, Diomedes felt a sharp feverish thrill. His idea rose, as from an arm-chair, moved, came to him, he felt its clasp and its embrace, lived with it all the evening and lay down with it on his lonely bed. Naked and cold, tenacious and dumb, it lay by him watching over his sleep.

Christine's voice called him from below the mountain. He got up, left his cell and walked down towards the belated traveller, a staff in one hand, and in the other a heavy lantern. But Christine, as soon as she beheld him, ran away screaming:

“I am afraid of the great dark fir trees.”

## CHAPTER II

### THE POPLARS

*Flakes law in the air, the whitish poplar flowers*

AT dawn Diomedes was released. He then thought of Pascase and pitied him for his folly. He judged him capable really of letting himself be caught or even of giving himself freely, born to bear contentedly the heavy burden of sentimental bondage. His fear was but the instinctive cry of the beast surprised amidst the peace of the cavern, but once captured, he would enter the new cage (so similar to the cavern) with proud docility. . . .

“It would be curious if he were really in love with Christine! A pleasing psychology to follow! One must thwart Nature. Nothing is more humorous than to mock the old artless goddess and to lash

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somewhat her lovers. Simple souls will be baffled even to tears. . . .”

He resumed:

“This is still too much. I express hatred and scorn, I who am inclined only towards pity. To have pity on mankind. All other sentiment is excessive. I would wish to bestow around me plentiful alms. . . .”

Flakes lay in the air, the whitish poplar flowers. A young woman passed, her pink dress trimmed with puffs, a briar rose-bush gently brushed by passing lambs. He thought of Fanette. But it was Cyran’s hour. For more amusing still was Cyran with his spitefulness become timid and surreptitious, his equivocal words insinuated in a gentle voice, with all the outward forms of pure intentions—false moneys in the poor-box.

He was decorating a poor chapel of Grey-Friars at Auteuil, painter of those whose painting is but an abbreviated form of writing, and at nightfall, his page done, he would return by boat, to the small café in the rue Saint Benoit where friends would

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join him. Mass in the morning, in the evening the café; Cyran's life oscillated now blissfully between this joy and that pleasure.

Now he laid his tobacco, his pipe and a small black prayer-book on the table, stroked his white hair and with lips upturned, said, pushing the little prayer-book towards Diomedes:

— Yes, my dear fellow, that is what I have come to, a lass of fourteen delighted with the insuperable nonsense of amorous repetitions. “Little month of Mary”! It is funny, isn't it? Cyran, the man of prostitutes! But I have so loved the flesh, I have so often drunken and eaten the flesh and blood of woman that I can now commune but with fallacious hosts. Ah, celestial dew, early-morning manna! Ah, let it weep, let it rain! I am executing a painting to explain this: a procession of white-robed veiled women who advance each holding in her hand a leafless branch blossomed with a heart. It resembles a large red lily. Everything else is white, nothing save white,



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and a snowy dew falls from the pale heaven.  
. . . It is very beautiful. . . .

Somewhat domineering with Pascase and a few others, Diomedes did not feel so much at ease with Cyran, whose headstrong and tortuous imagination puzzled him sometimes. Nevertheless, he liked him. To give himself time, he wished to discuss the technical question of white on white, but Cyran continued:

— To paint no more but for first communicants! Do not the fresh souls of these childish lovers have as great a right to art as has your corrupted soul, tell me, Diomedes? Angels, flames, doves and lilies.

— And bine-weeds which entangle their legs, interrupted Diomedes. They are just as much corrupted as you are, but innocently; they do not know it. Little girls, you know what sometimes come to them?

— I have known it, answered Cyran with a certain gravity.

He put his prayer-book away and resumed gently after a silence:

— Diomedes, I do not pretend to deceive

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you, and you know me too well not to be able to detect my true thought among the false stones. Well, I really have need of candour, of freshness, of whiteness, of snow! I have burnt myself so deeply, I have soiled myself so much. . . .

— Yes, said Diomedes, sin is a morphine; one dies from its pricks, and one dies from the absence of its pricks. It is perhaps better to die pleasantly.

— But I was dying stupidly, with the sensation of sinking in the moving mud of a morass . . . one day I was reading pages of “Hello.” Emotion overruled the smile, I dreamed, I meditated. . . . Ultimately I was overwhelmed.

— Saint Paul, saint Cyran, as Cyrène says.

— Perhaps. . . . What has become of her?

— Nothing good, said Diomedes. She is weary and still loves you.

Cyran resumed without insisting:

— I am very happy, I live in peace, I wallow in snow and in white-lead. I do

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not fear Cyrène or any other woman and I paint frescoes on the walls of an absolutely bare church. I have work for twenty years more; I will die there if I am given a bed of straw and some ashes when my hour comes. Adieu.

“How suddenly he went! He is afraid I should speak to him of Cyrène,” mused Diomedes. “Cyran is afraid. Pascase is afraid. And I? I also am afraid. I! Yes, I. I am afraid of the woman who moved me, of the woman whom I desire, of the woman whom I love. I am afraid of the only one, I am afraid of the real one. Yesterday, Pascase spoke as I thought, and now Cyran. . . . There is but one. . . . It is perhaps the same one diversified to suit the forms of soul and body which clings like a cuirass, or a hair-cloth shirt, to our rebellious breasts. . . . Oh! when I saw her brown eyes look at me so softly and so imperiously! . . .

“No. I wish to toy with life, I wish to pass dreaming; I do not wish to believe; I do not wish to love; I do not wish to suffer;

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I do not wish to be happy; I do not wish to be a dupe. I look, I observe, I judge, I smile.

“But Pascase, but Cyran? Why do they fear? Pascase is afraid of the unknown and Cyran of the too-well known. I? I am afraid to bend my knee, that is all.

“Ah! Christine, Mauve, Fanette, save me!

“Enough! Moreover I can deny her existence in not thinking of her. Tomorrow Fanette.”

But during the whole evening, dragged through dark streets or under withered trees, he thought of Néobelle. She was a young girl, strong, full of life and will-power, caught sight of, one day in the past, and loved forthwith, painfully beautiful in the décolleté of a ball-dress and almost forsaken because of the severity of her brown eyes and of the full-bloom of a body whose power gainsaid the light and gentle fancy men have of a virgin. She would have been worshipped on the stage, amongst the measured exaltation of the tragic verses which her somewhat massive arm would

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have scanned with certitude. Looked at on the same level, on the floor of a drawing-room, she seemed exiled, much as a sumptuous hydrangea in the close of a pauper's yard. Verily her richness frightened one and desire died of an almost painful intensity, in the presence of that disturbing vision of her majestic charms. She was red-haired her coloring darkened by a skin whose pallor drank in all the lights and only gave forth a rich and warm shade of yellow roses.

“Deny her?” resumed Diomedes. “She is undeniable. Flee from her, at the utmost flee from her? Her name alone, and I see her womanly, mute, smiling, and if she breathes, if her breaths swell like sails, I embark on the ship and am carried toward the high seas, and the ancient islands of felicities. But she is not the stupid flesh that seeks the joys of the kine and then retires and returns to the pasture; there is grace and intelligence in her majestic appeal: she is gifted with the smile.

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“She smiles seriously she is as serious as a divinity. On bended knees. No, neither before men nor women will I offer or accept. There are so many of these eyes of goodwill, or of these robes which fall before a glance. Idols to be touched without preamble and without fear — and so alike all of them to those who hide in shrines! It is such artlessness to wish oneself robbed by the bursting of a lock that a tear will force open, or the breaking of a mirror that a prayer will shatter. . . .

“I will neither pray nor weep. I uplift my desire and my desire uplifts me. We will go long and far, burden each in turn, towards nothing, towards forgetfulness, towards silence and perhaps towards peace.

“She troubles me. I do not wish that the waters of the lake should be dimmed with burst bubbles: it annoys me when I look among the green pebbles and the grasses, at the playings of the blue devils which are my beloved thoughts.

“Let me be uneasy, sad and free, rather than be happy by the abandoning of my



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hands! And yet her hair would make beautiful ropes, soft as silk, strong as hemp.

“No. To play with Fanette.

“Will she still amuse me? Yesterday Christine would have perhaps disappointed me! Cyran froze me. To acquire that soul of mist and snow when one has been Cyran, the man of abrupt words, precise gestures and dry eyes. To change is perhaps to decline.”.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GIRDLE

*Art desires that nude women should be  
adorned with a girdle*

WHEN Diomedes entered, Fanette, fair, fresh, wholly adamic, with her hair down her back, was walking to and fro meditatively, reading a tender book in an undertone. Having kissed the lips of her friend, very cordially, she put in the tender book, as a book-mark, the ribbon of a garter that lay on the divan, then in a languid voice said:

— O Diomedes, if you knew how mystical I am!

— You must put on a girdle, Fanette, it is more chaste and besides, art desires that women should be adorned with a girdle.

## "THE · HORSES · OF · DIOMEDES"

The book mark will do very well. It is enough to arrest the attention with this tiny cameo.

Conform artfully to the Nymphs of Jean Goujon; they are very beautiful. Now slippers with high heels. It is much better so, it lengthens the leg. A woman with these notions can acquire nearly as agreeable an attitude as that of the delicate statues of old. Limbs and no waist, hips and no bosom. It is the nymph.

—No, said Fanette, all this bores me. I am going to dress. I only like myself dressed or as frank as an angel.

She clad herself in a soft ample robe, tied on a girdle and gentle and good came to kneel by Diomedes, who began caressing her hair.

—How fine your hair is, Fanette! How fine and pure you are! Happy soul!

—Yes, I am very happy. My friends are not all as gentle as you, Diomedes, but their fidelity pleases and reassure me. I live with joy, a rose-tree that one inhales,

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that one despoils and that blooms always anew with good grace. I am very happy. And then I love Diomedes and Diomedes loves me.

— Yes, Fanette. You are so innocent a child, and so vivacious a flesh!

— What do you mean?

— A bird-like flesh which soars to all pleasure, to all music, to all glimmer, to all pilfering, the flesh of a bird candid and free. . . .

— You are rather jealous, Diomedes?

— Yes, rather.

— I am not at all jealous, Diomedes. I give myself to all the lips that please me, candidly without really being able to help it. That is why I live in such happiness. Nothing forces me; no one constrains me; I walk softly towards all flowers, as along the pathway in a vast forest; and if beasts come I climb a tree, and if I am eaten up, well, what of it? Diomedes, won't all my wicked little sisters be eaten up also sometime or other? Occasionally when I am walking, I think of things far away, of

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renewals, of fresh cups that invisible hands hold out to ardent lips, of fruits that drop, of kisses that roam, of songs that play, of lambs, of fountains, of a fragrance of eternal love that would perfume the earth. I know I am but a little wanton, but I have the heart of a little Magdalene and sometimes, Diomedes,—don't laugh,—the soul of a young betrothed. It makes an exquisite bouquet, I am as happy as an angel.

And truly, now, stretched on cushions, her body enveloped in pink, her long fair silken hair cast like rays on her shoulders, the colour of her cheeks heightened by reflection, her eyes candidly blue, Fanette had the air of an angel, quite young, astonished at life, an air at the same time sumptuous and frail.

Diomedes wished to kiss her feet, so graceful and divine was she, and as his lips touched the cold mother-of-pearl, he mused somewhat stupidly:

"Morality has mowed all human joy.

Fanette is happy because she ignores the distinction between right and wrong. . . ."

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As was his habit, he had thought too rapidly; he resumed:

“That is rather heavy, one ought to explain it, tone it down.”

Fanette, being tickled, began to fidget as a child in its cot. She rose, looked at herself in the mirror, shedding light with her hair. Observing the book placed on the mantel-piece, she said:

— Listen: “Of this sweetness is born the voluptuousness of the heart and of all the corporal forces, so that man imagines he is enwrapped inwardly in the divine folds of love. This voluptuousness and this consolation are greater and more pleasing to the body and the soul than all the luxuries bestowed by earth. This voluptuousness fills the heart to the extent that a man cannot contain himself, so intense is the fulness of his interior joy. Of these delights is born spiritual intoxication. Spiritual intoxication is produced when man experiences more delectations and delights than either his heart or desire can wish or contain.” Well, Diomedes, I also, the



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poor Fanette, in hours of pleasant solitude in the morning, if there be sunlight and some flowers around me, I feel such an intense joy at being alive that my heart is rent and I weep. Sounds are to me a music; perfumes an intoxication; and I remain so for long, enraptured with superhuman voluptuousness. . . . Do you believe me, Diomedes?

— Why should you not be visited by the infinite? You are blessed because you are pure and sweet, and God returns to you the love you give unto men.

— That does not correspond with the book, said Fanette dreamily. I am carnal as a goat. I do not understand.

— One must not want to understand too much, resumed Diomedes. One day towards evening, after working long, I had a sort of ecstasy, I felt a supernatural uplifting and I saw a light, infinitely brilliant, which seemed to me the centre of the world. Then I fell again into my humanity, and that is all.

A large basket of rose-coloured violets

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was brought in. Excited by this living fragrance, searching the finer sensualities, they sought for the most delicate caresses, the most rare embraces. In voluptuous quarellings, Fanetts had indeed the serious and unquiet look of a nanny goat. Continuously moving and shaken by thrills, she never smiled and her eyes suddenly filled with superhuman joy, then all at once she burst out laughing and sang long, with lips closed, as might a magic violin.

Diomedes forgot all other sensation in listening to the mysterious murmurings of this pure white and rigid body which seemed to live but in the distance of dreams.

Awakened, she was at once joyful; dressed, suddenly modest, she wished to eat, drink, smoke, amuse herself with trinkets, pictures, while Diomedes admired a creature so divinely animal. At moments like these, he loved her rapturously, moved by so much life, so much grace and so much ingenuousness. He mused:

“She leads me far from ‘the hermit’s hut with its thatched and perhaps reeded

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roof.’ So different from Christine, she also is made to be loved.”

At last he realized his fatigue and his stupidity, and rose asking:

— Fanette, dear child, what is your idea of mysticism?

Fanette answered:

— It is when love is stronger than all.

Diomedes, on arriving home, was still repeating the touching answer of the naive Fanette.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PLAYING WATERS.

*The playing waters I look at always  
fall again*

THE entombment by Michael Angelo: this Christ upheld by the shoulders and who seems to walk, and who seems also to come out of some foul place, and who is carried to his bed absolutely nude, despoiled by robbers, this Christ, no not dead, but inebriate from being dead. . . .

He had spent all the afternoon rue Bonaparte, in those small museums miraculously rich in all the essence of art, for hours bent over albums, and now, exhausted, he stopped, tenacious despite the jostling, before this absurd picture, hideous and terrifying, of troubled and perhaps impure thought. It really looked like a parody and even like a parade, but so tragical and

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so lamentable as if gasping and saying it was the horror less of dying than of living, the stupor of agony, with no certitude save the tomb with its gaping jaws. This Christ will not resuscitate.

Diomedes bought the cartoon, seldom offered to the eye of the public, which would despise it as it despises everything that must be read twice, listened to twice, and looked at twice. There are still and always two worlds, for nothing has changed or will ever change,—the world of the common people and the world of the initiated.

Seeing Pascase advancing, he added:

“And the world of the catechumens.”

Much agitated, Pascase shook his head, waved his arms, shrugged his shoulders. At last he spoke, furious at the variegated statues, some new and freshly painted specimens of which he had just seen on his way. He took Diomedes immediately to the window where these were, but indignation made him almost speechless and he could not explain himself clearly. Diomedes looked and saw a holy Jesuit, his head covered

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with a biretta with puffs, his black cassock enriched with a lace surplice and an embroidered stole. He stood, brandishing a crucifix of old ivory with the gesture of blessing the stars, his left hand on his hip, and with his foot, clad in an elegant shoe with a silver buckle, he was crushing a Chinese dragon.

Before this work of clear and meritorious symbolism, Diomedes was neither surprised nor saddened.

— This seems to you hideous because it is painted and quite new, my dear Pascase, but nude, without being less ugly, it would be quite like those base marble statues you are willing to enjoy each spring. The art of “Saint Sulpice” is nothing else but the official art of today put, by a few ingenious touches, within reach of the poor and devout classes. For four centuries, Religion being prudent, has bent tractable to the successive tastes which have reigned over the world. She follows, she obeys. Be assured that she is even incapable of inventing a new ugliness. This form which scares you is a laudable compromise, it is the statuary of the day



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subjected to the polychromatic tradition. To do better would require genius, but genius is the innovation, the indiscipline, it is the fire . . . yes, it would need the fire, the great purifying fire. . . . Do you believe that this rich peasants' art is much inferior to the demented bronzes that agitate their antennae all along the Luxembourg, that museum of the indigent? Each social group has its particular ideal of beauty and power, incomprehensible to the others. Higher up, when it is a question of individuals and not of swarming castes, of intelligence and not of instinct, the harmony of tastes and judgments is equally rare and is realised rather on words than on ideas. This small discovery has inclined me towards indulgence — and I admit the beauty of this vestry-virgin since she is pure Beauty to so many gentle hearts and to so many simple souls. . . .

Diomedes added after a mysterious little laugh:

—My friend, indulgence is the aristocratic form of disdain.

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Then again, as if inwardly:

— Oh, how difficult it is!

But Pascase, not having thoroughly understood, began his discourse:

— I cannot disdain what wounds me. It is a question of my religion or, in short, of the only religion which is offered to me in these sterile climates. It belongs to me as much as to the innocent seminarist whose heart burns a pale wax taper. As an escort to the superior ideal, I may exact supreme beauty, crush these larvæ, tear these masks which hide it from me. They have the right to be infamous, they have not the right to be mediocre. Diomedes, your hypocritical indulgence. . . .

— Pascase, why do you wish me a hypocrite? I have not a violent mind, it is merely rather vivacious. It is this vivacity I would wish to overcome, soften, bend to new forms of intellectual expression. One must not seek truth but, in presence of a man, understand which is his truth. Live beyond; live above; judge mentally; smile; speak, as a friend of many tongues, many

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languages; as a friend of many souls, commune at many tables under all human species. Keep oneself intangible yet, having listened to all murmurs, answer with all words.

Pascase looked at his friend with fear.

There was such a contrast between Diomedes' life and his thought, so intense a variance sometimes between his speech and his laughter, between his gestures and his look, that Pascase hesitated between the two ways and would withdraw without daring to choose. Tall, dark, but of clear countenance, with a shadow of a dry and thick beard, with long restless arms and feverish hands, Pascase, who had the air, in life, of being a wasted force, despite a few outbursts reasoned following too loyal and too regular a logic to pursue willingly the complicated imaginings of his friend in their curves and knottings. He loved him with a sort of timorous and fleeting admiration and with the air, really, of protecting physically the nervous and fragile Diomedes, whose complexion was paled even more by

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burning eyes, and who seemed occasionally to stagger under the weight of a heavy monk's head, glabrous and shorn. Having prepared an answer, it was not necessary for him to expound it; a gesture of Diomedes brought back their conversation to its starting point. Pascase made the admission with sincerity: This row of freakish bronzes, furious males and frenzied females, surpassed in ugliness the saddest display of idols at least calm and almost dignified in their torpor of sacred caricatures.

The two men did not enter the shed, but went under the trees, amidst the animal innocence of the racket players, the bashful gentleness of the children and birds, the serenity of the flowers. At last they stopped in front of the fountain.

Seated, they listened, then they looked.

— The playing waters I look at, said Diomedes, always fall again; but those I listen to are sometimes silent. They have not the reserve of gesture; they have that of speech. One ought to compare them to women in love. It would make a pretty

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treatise. I invited Tanche to do so, he has taste. Playing waters, what an exquisite pretext to set off the grace of our last poets! Since Verlaine, how many sobs in marble basins! Would it not be charming and ingenious to classify the poets by the ideas or images evoked in them by the fragile and mysterious playing waters? All that mixed with a little history of the sentimental hydraulics of gardens since Petrarch and the “fontaine de Vaucluse,” which certainly was a fountain. . . . What do you think of it? Encourage Tanche.

At that moment, as a conclusion, as the last page of an album and as moving picture, Mauve was before them. Without a word, stopping suddenly, she took Diomedes' hands and kissed them in one kiss with sensual devotion, then she said, answering beforehand all questions of eyes and lips:

— It is Mauve.

Pascase bowed, not without ceremony. Then Mauve burst out laughing.

Diomedes explained:

— Do not be scared, Pascase. Mauve is

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also called Laughter. She laughs because she has never seen you. Mauve laughs as a child at all that is new to her. Mauve loves you already, knowing that you are my friend.

She answered, with the expression of a gentle animal in her eyes:

— Mauve is quite serious, even when she laughs. Mauve has the right to laugh, being young, beautiful and good. Mauve is very good, and also very wicked when she is thwarted, and very ugly when she weeps. Mauve loves Pascase if Pascase wishes to be loved.

— You hear, Pascase? And what beautiful language! Mauve always speaks of herself in the third person, with the gravity of a great sachem, as of an important being, precious and rare. Laughter comes before or after, for Mauve values her genius and only unveils it with grace.

While she listened, somewhat perplexed, to these equivocal compliments, Pascase was looking with pleasure at the lovely person, fresh flower, rich with all the charms of a flower, somewhat dark of hair as are



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certain columbines, with her corselet swelled as a poppy filled with milk. He wished he could carry her in his arms to a far away land and lay her down on a bed of fresh mint, at the side of a stream under the willows. Then she would laugh at frothing the running water with her slender fingers and kneeling, very grave, would say: “Mauve loves Pascase.”

At that moment Mauve began to laugh really, realising with the lace of her handkerchief almost the gestures he had dreamed. He listened, but heard nothing. She was bending over Diomedes' ear.

Disappointed, Pascase thought dreamily that Christine must be far lovelier and of a purer perfume. He suddenly discovered a vulgarity in the floral elegance of Mauve, her raiment was quite like other passing raiments.

She had said in an undertone to Diomedes:  
— Pascase is pleasing to Mauve.

Diomedes answered:

— Mauve is a little gadder.

Then, out loud:

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— No confidences. I am willing to guess, I do not wish to know.

He added:

— Where was she going so fast?

She answered, with one breath:

— To see Tanche, who was to introduce me to Cyran, for whom I am to sit for an angel's head in a church picture.

— Mauve shall be an angel, said Diomedes; we will take her to Cyran's. Are you coming, Pascase?

They went on, Pascase in front, silent and humiliated. Diomedes could not allow this and wished Mauve on his friend's arm, who then straightened himself innocently and began to talk. Mauve listened to him with innocent airs, her whole face upturned as if to drink the words on his lips, and Diomedes was amused by the little comedy.

Cyran was alone. Tanche, who was entering by another door, wanted to scold Mauve. She began to laugh, then to say, standing straight before Cyran:

— It is Mauve.

Cyran was already looking at her as

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painters look, with the cold, assured eye which disrobes, feels and measures. He begged her to take off her hat and to ruffle her hair slightly. Having mused an instant, he said:

— I will make them of green gold, gold with reflections of emeralds. . . . Supernatural tresses, divine tresses, tresses which will breathe as the grass of the prairies. . . . And under the sombre green of that ocean, invisible ranunculi will give an odour to the colour. . . . Yes, an odour of carnal gold . . . transfigured tresses. . . . All the flesh in a transparent shade under the long robe of hair. . . . The head is beautiful.

Mauve wished, following her habit, to kiss Cyran's hand, but the old painter calmed any such desire by a gesture almost of benediction, saying obscure words:

— Art is an exorcist. The eyes alone know beauty. . . . One must be white, all white. . . . Render the invisible by the visible. . . . Faintly. . . . Dreams under veils. . . . Faintly, faintly.

He spoke long, his eyes fixed on Mauve

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and all looked at Mauve. In the midst of this effluvium, among these men who breathed her in, Mauve expanded, exhaled all her perfumes, her flesh took a rosy hue, her eyes became more brilliant, she exalted herself to a state of radiancy.

Each word of Cyran's touched her heart as a flame, as a small delight which swelled, flowed, and permeated her body. Her flesh (in ebullition) was working, plastic to the hands which knead the dough. . . . Suddenly Cyran felt the intensity of this offering; a flash of fire ran through his veins, a dart of flame, rapid and painful. Then he was silent, contracting his long thin hand on the marble.

Mauve, on the contrary, was softening now, melting. Sure that she had wounded, she kissed the wound, smiled with the pride of a blissful child. Cyran gave her an appointment at his studio. Then feigning to be interested in the time, her eyes oscillating between her watch and the clock, she got up and vanished after a bow and three little nods.

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As they were returning, Diomedes said to Pascase:

— Mauve is a pacha. You saw the scene of fascination. She lures whom she wants. Ah! Mauve gives us a fine example of frankness and liberty. She is not domestic; the kennel has never subjugated or even cramped her. She walks. She has admirable legs, the legs of a woman who walks, who runs after pleasure, legs that are so different to those which wait.

— She is simply voluptuous, said Pascase.

— Without doubt, Mauve is voluptuous and that is the reason of the beauty of her lines. She is lust itself, active, conscious, almost studied. She loves passion for itself, for that which it brings with it of movement, life immediate sensation. Although vain, she chooses her lovers less for their attractions than for their name or their wit. I believe she is very happy; she deserves to be so.

— You seem to like her very much.

— Very much, answered Diomedes. She is to me a charming spectacle, instructive

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and moral. Yes, moral. My friend, in the small world in which I live and which I have contributed to create, morality is not understood on the ancient basis. One believes that the most moral being is, not the one who submissively suffers the law, but he who having created for himself an individual law, consistent with his own nature and his own genius, can realize himself following that law, in the measure of his abilities and of the obstacles opposed to him by society. A new mode, or rather one found again and reconstituted with some unpublished elements, for it is in short the principle of religious morality for which the soul, that is to say the individual, the untearable and unbreakable being, exists unique and sacred. This morality is very much detested by the states, which punish it, and by historians, who reprove it. They are right: it tends to destroy authority, for one little understands the physical authority which a soul can have over a soul. Now, consider, Pascase, that the body is but the visible manifestation of the soul, thus

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exteriorised according to its power to create the matter and the worlds; yes the worlds, and imagine the little world you are, so closed even to me, so inscrutable to my ideas and my imaginings. You laugh that I should ever dream to impose on you a doctrine, and yet you judge the world by the one doctrine imposed on you by force. If I were the stronger, Pascase, you would think as I think. Take yourself then as common measure, as pedlars, fair and wise, measure cloth by the measure of their arm. I fear, my friend, that you have no religion, for if you had you would understand better your importance in the general plan of the universe, and you would understand what place you fill, larger than societies, than states, than nations—for words are words and man is a man. All that apropos of Mauve, the little gadder! And why not? She does what she pleases, she must be admired. If the infinite is thwarted by her conduct, it will so inform Mauve some day or other. It speaks to Fanette!

And Diomedes broke into the obscure



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little laugh with which he willingly concluded his discourses. But Pascase gravely asked:

— Diomedes, are you ready to go to the end of your theories?

Diomedes answered:

— To the end? No, not today. It would be too far.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DRONE

*I would be a large drone, all velvet, which  
plunges and disappears in the bell of a  
foxglove*

TUESDAY, 13 MAY.

DIOMEDES, my friend, you are like the others, you are afraid, you also. Why have I not seen you at my house, or in those friendly homes so hospitable to our fruitless pratings? Yes, we are two reapers who must join at dawn to mow the sorrowful tares or those fraudulent ears of barley whose grains fall into dust under the touch. Dust which contains an unknown source of life and renovation, dust useless to the reapers, but perhaps richer in mysteries than the most weighty ears and the purest flours. Is it I who frighten you, or so much vanity? But who knows which one of our words will be beautiful, which one of our

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actions pregnant? Perhaps the most despised. And perhaps the face of things will be changed because you picked a flower for my bodice in walking along the pathway. Can you measure the power of my smile even if it be equivocal, and if my shoulders are white will you not be satisfied, stronger and more courageous? Is it then impossible for you to kiss my hand so softly that I should be moved and ready to ascend to heaven?

“I wish to maintain the essential vanity of our relations. Let us leave the ears of corn full of milk for those who would die of another food. Are you reassured, at having but to flit on flowers? For I know I have the air of an impudent devourer, I who am the most innocent of virgins. My sensual power escapes my will; it is all perfume; I am as candid as the lilac or the censer and naive to the point of being without corporal modesty. Do you wish to see me posed? You will see a statute such as are in the museums.

“I seemed to divine that you were afraid

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of being gobbled up by the lioness, poor hero so very precious! Do not tremble. I am not hungry. I only like your words and your air of being superior even to your fear. It is pleasant to me to listen to you. You relate what you will never do and perhaps you are capable of doing what you do not recount. You are whimsical and just sufficiently hypocritical to seem mysterious. That pleases me. I dream about you, having nothing to dream about myself. The harem which you have in your mind admits me behind a latticed window. I look without blushes and without emotion: the gestures I perceive seem to me obscure and I do not seek to uplift the veil you draw over the others. Do not think me shocked by these pastimes and the nudity of all these swimmers; only I will not enter your stream and I will not invite you to come and bathe with me in the small sacred lake where I cleanse my knees and my sins.

“Here, then, my friend, are two or three fine pages as you like them, (I hope), of net embroidered with the greatest care, in-

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tended for you and to be put in a drawer under a sachet of white or blue heliotrope; then we will better understand each other and I would even tell you all I think if my thoughts were more tractable.

“My dear Diomedes, I must really be very fond of you or I must have great faith in your loyalty, or I must know you to be too timid or too proud to profit by an avowal. Or again, is it that I experience an absolutely feminine pleasure in humiliating myself before you? But you will know: I live in a solitude of soul like death. At certain hours I am a young girl, bored, alone midway on the bridge, equally far away from the doll she despises and the man she fears. For I also—I am afraid, not of you, though perhaps like you, of the known or unknown robber. This is a phase that can last and become firm if one could add to it the cement of intellectual devotion and if the mortar should cling and harden.

“It will cling to me if one wishes it. I would wish to live in a fraternal and profound intimacy with a mind. I would

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be a large drone, all velvet, which plunges and disappears in the bell of a foxglove, then pushes the door ajar and goes out all sprinkled with gold dust. What a wonderful occupation for the springtime of my life, coming from the silk of the cocoon where in secret I accomplish my metamorphosis! The question pertains to a useless being, a being one terms as useless as wild oats; you see therefore that I do not esteem too particularly the function on which I have fixed my choice; unless, Diomedes, it should be very agreeable to feel the large drone pilfering in the bells of one's brain. I do not know but that afterwards I would be more beautiful, all glittering with the golden dust which flowers the palace of intelligence.

“This dream done and undone, I have thought it would be more becoming to take a lover. It is sufficiently consistent with the custom and good morals. I would love him perhaps; it seems one has these surprises. Then, altogether given to the material and surrendered to its sensations. I would bend my spirit to the images it

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cvokes and my being to the gestures most apt to stimulate the perfect blossoming of of creative impulse. Is that truly my vocation? I ignore it and I consult you, Diomedes. Also on this doubt, that perhaps these two roads are not altogether irreconcilable enemies, that perhaps they cross each other here and there under the trees of the forest as in the labryinths one sees painted on the threshold of old books. Men have told me they wished to find a double delight in woman's food and beverage, that she must be a fruit. But those men — what would they be to me and what would they give me? They demand too much. I wish to reserve one half of myself — which one? You who desire neither one nor the other, for fear that one should poison your will-power and the other paralyse your strength, give me some advice as disinterested as your genius, and which will fall from a height, a boulder loosened from a crag by the wind.

“Yet I am afraid that you may encourage my solitude. You will judge that pride behooves me, that it should swell my



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heart at the same time as it closes my lips; far from me, I must please you apart from others. Eyes which seem to you haughty must not soften even to dreams, nor must the heaven of desire enter through these windows; you would wish them closed, or their panes veiled with some muslin; in fine, that I should be virginal. Am I not virginal, being a virgin?

“I have anticipated all and await.

“Your friend  
BELLE.

“P.S.—Do not answer me. I wish to see you again before listening to you. Come Saturday to Cyrène’s.”

(TELEGRAM.)

“TUESDAY, 13 MAY.

“Do not read my letter and bring it back to me sealed, Saturday at Cyrène’s.

“NÉO.”

## “THE · HORSES · OF · DIOMEDES”

Diomedes found the two missives that evening late, on returning home. Having read the telegram, he was moved to pity by the other one. Poor letter, it was heavy!

“If I do not read it, who will? One must read letters. An unread letter is absurd, as words said too low and not heard. There is in this letter a whole day, and perhaps a whole night of a woman. What does she want of me? It is the first time she has written me except with a few brief sentences on a card. Néo, the new, the unknown, the temptress. Perhaps she has partly unveiled herself or having attempted to draw the drapery too lightly round her loins she has outlined her figure thinking she was hiding it better. Perhaps in reading the opposite of what she says, I will get to know a little of her soul. So little! But why this defence, this withdrawal, this gesture towards the lips which the letter has reached, this impatience of the hand that would fain take back what it has just given? What can she give me, pages of literature; offer, herself? Absurd, she is proud. But she

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knows I fear her and perhaps she wishes to play and make me recoil, then, tired of my cowardice, say good-bye to me and turn her head. If she should say to me soft, tender and childlike things? She is not child enough. Moreover I do not know her. Of no woman have I less notion. I know only that she is beautiful, that she tempts me, that I fear her. To love her would mean to renounce everything, that is to say renounce irony without which life is but a field, green or yellow or shorn according to the seasons and the appetites of the sheep. It is irony that varies the unity of things, in multiplying the aspects by the diversity of the smiles with which one hails them. Irony, it is the facet-like eye of the dragon-fly which creates itself a palatial garden from a bramble-flower. Néobelle is an horizon. She is erect as a mountain, she is true and one must look her straight in the eyes with serenity.

“Oh! A mountain! A tree on a mountain and one which looks large because it is on the mountain. A tree, one embraces it:

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two arms are sufficient. A tree. Often what one takes for a tree is but a branch which hangs broken and which the wood-cutter will carry away on his shoulder and chop and throw into the fire. It is a branch, it is a scion, a shoot of the year that one breaks off to make a staff; it is a large hemlock that children tear up in returning from school to shape as a reedpipe or a pea-shooter.

“It is a large hemlock. . . .

“What can she have to say to me? She is there, enclosed as a mystery in the secret of this letter; I would see her if I had faith. I do not wish to see her. . . .

“She is there, she is reclining. She sleeps smiling. She must be captured adroitly and only awakened in the joy or the horror of being possessed. . . .”

He had already passed the small gold blade under the fold of the envelope.

“Four sheets of white paper, perhaps perfumed! The host is empty. It is the deacon’s mass. I will return her the letter unspoiled. *Intactam intacta*. The idea of

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this purely ceremonial liturgy inspires me with Latin puns. Child, what a commonplace snare! Diomedes or the test of discretion!”

Satisfied, he could laugh a little. He was less afraid. To play with Néobelle would be charming.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MARIGOLD

*In this yellow distaff, she amuses herself by planting right in the centre of the forehead a large golden marigold.*

CHRISTINE was coming. . . .

"If my history is written," mused Diomedes, "it will be necessary to say that each time that I await Christine I am intensely bored. I am as bored as a god, tired of my universe, solitary in the midst of my web despite all the small flies which come to get caught and are all of them so similar! And the males likewise, all sex. . . . And I? Shall I leave this prison? Not yet, since I await Christine. So little, and Christine is such a frail shadow, almost incorporeal by dint of chaste silence. Silence is chaste.

"Go out? One must return. One cannot always be out. Emerge from self?

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One would be cold. In self is warmth, one can lie down, one can wallow. The carpet is thick, the windows fast closed, the fire bright, the lamp softly shaded. Luxurious cell; but lust knocks at the door. The definition of love by Spinoza is not absurd: ‘*Titillation quaedam, concomitante idea causae externae.*’ If the worthy philosopher had not warned us himself ‘that he calls *titillatio* or *hilaritas* the affection of joy when appertaining at the same time to the body and the soul,’ one could smile; but such as he thought it and wrote it in his specific tongue, this memorable proposition is but too true, it is absolute; it is terrible in its rude banality; and that is why I await Christine, exterior cause of joy without which today I cannot experience any joy: and that is why I also love Mauve, Fanette, and. . . .”

He stopped. He refused to think any more of the four sheets of white paper whose trick, too quickly divined, humiliated him. And then, how mention her name, even in thought, after these two little frailties?



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Yet he did name her, but apart, with precautions, having first laid a carpet under her feet, the carpet of his inviolate cell. He ended by admitting that he loved Néobelle in a different way than Fanette, with another mind, with other senses. He admitted this almost without fear; he was becoming familiarised.

Néobelle brought him to himself. He mused and was astonished at living so little and so ill in the midst of so many almost sentimental agitations. He really did nothing in life but go and come, look, feel, compare. That is what one calls nothing: it is to live and it really is nothing. To compare ideas, to compare forms, to question oneself and answer by judgments which are tomorrow void and possibly false. He understood the vacuity of that formula: to enjoy life. Those only enjoy who are not conscious of their bliss. The happy man has but the look of being happy.

“To go and come; I do not even go, I revolve. If I continue to muse, I will get to the place in the school where this sign-

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board is hung on a nail: ‘Regret not having learnt a manual trade such as making wood shavings! It is clean, it smells good, the children stop to watch the shavings come out of the jointing-plane, etc.’

“So, I know before hand what I am going to think.

“It is whimsical.”

The bell rang. It was Pascase.

Diomedes received him willingly. He was thinking no more of Christine, who was useless now since salvation had entered under the form of another human being.

— Have you seen Mauve again?

Pascase answered abruptly, as if displeased:

— No. Why?

— Because you will see her again. She has put you in her album; she will come across you one morning, in looking over it, and an hour after she will be with you, with that radiant and impertinent air which you know. Admit that she pleases you also?

Pascase shrugged his shoulders. He was

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feverish, he moved round the room, seeming to breathe suspicion, his mouth puckered, his eyes restless. At last he sat down and said:

—Why speak to me of all these women?  
—this Mauve, this Fanette, this Cyrène,  
this . . . .

He was silent and Diomedes, himself unnerved, said, but quite softly:

—This. . . . Finish. Ha, I presume you will not pronounce these syllables which are wanting to your enumeration?

—No, I will not pronounce them.

—Listen, Pascase, resumed Diomedes in a fraternal tone. I will not pronounce them either, the syllables, the two syllables you stop at; but I declare to you again, although they are agreeable to me they are not necessary to me. Suppose that I ignore them.

Pascase answered, now almost calm:

—It is I who would wish to ignore them, but I am absurd, probably ill, I cannot forget them or pronounce them. Possibly this will seem to you a somewhat curious

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psychology, I came because I know she is coming and I wish to see her; I beg of you, let me see her.

— Truly, you are absurd, answered Diomedes, and for two reasons. First of all, you say to me today the exact contrary of what you declared the other day with great tremblings. Secondly, there is no known reason for her coming today. However, it is true that I have thought of her and that I desired her.

— I read your thought, said Pascase. And if you think of her it is perhaps because she thinks of you. There is a chance of her coming.

— And if she does come, and when you have seen her?

Pascase answered, with the dispassionate logic that he easily wielded, even during his extraordinary fits of nervousness:

— I have considered. I think I love her because I do not know her. Having seen her, I would probably not care for her. Then I will be cured and peaceful. If on the contrary, which is possible, she fascinates

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me, I will not be more unhappy than before.

— It is well reasoned, but what do you do with me in all these adventures?

— Nothing. I leave you.

— Still, I would not wish to lend myself to the ungraceful game either of being complacent or of being a bad friend. Why do you not take Christine without telling me?

— I am not a thief. Also, how? I can only know her through you. Refuse and all will be said.

— My friend, resumed Diomedes, are you then one of those before whom one must be silent? I spoke to you of a woman and your child's imagination sees her and your man's imagination desires her as if she was that one destined to you, the only one! Pure sentimentality! Are you no more afraid then, no more? She will not please you. She is a creature made, it would seem, for me alone, ordained for my pleasures according to the beauties of soul and flesh that fascinate me. Now, think that her hair, really quite ordinary, has shades like a pale brass helmet and that in

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this yellow distaff she amuses herself by planting, right in the centre of the forehead, a large golden marigold. Nothing more absurd; but I am accustomed to it. She does not talk, she hardly says yes, seldom no! Her thought is avowed by gestures, attitudes, smiles, that I alone can understand.

— I will understand them also. Love understands everything. Are you then her only lover?

— No, answered Diomedes, I do not think so. Christine belongs, not like Mauve to those she chooses, not like Fanette to those who go to visit her: but to those who desire her with enough force to evoke her presence. However, those who possess her with me do not share her with me. She is different according to the hearts that call her. The lips whose kiss she accepts do not kiss the same shoulders, in kissing her shoulders; yet they are Christine's shoulders, and the fresh bosom of Christine, and her snow-white knees. Among the lovers whose love she suffers, some only know her face,

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others know but her knees, for a few she remains veiled; for others she remains robed; to others, dearer or more daring, or stronger in desire, she deports herself differently, according to the candor of her eternal beauty. Always, robed or unrobed, she is Christine and she is the Christine of whomsoever adores her fervently! All her appearances are chaste: she is always innocent and of a virginity continually renewed by grace. Each one of her lovers sees her different, following the seasons and the hours; she is sometimes always, and sometimes never, the same; she is the field, the heath, the river, the sea; the clouds influence her, and the sun; her eyes which change their shade do not change colour; a lover would recognize them, under the veil or under the shroud; but Christine is immortal.

— Immortal, said Pascase. So it is over? You have ceased to rail at me?

— I will answer you, said Diomedes, with the word that is familiar to you: I say what I think.



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— Dreams. From what I gather, Christine is a young woman, rather pretty, tractable, silent and capable of a certain amount of fidelity. You do not care for her excessively and she visits you seldom. Let me see her, she may perhaps love me.

— Pascase, how must I speak if I would make you understand me? Must I repeat my discourse or instruct you by a decisive and even brutal affirmation?

— Neither one nor the other, answered Pascase. You intermingle truth with so many dreams! Do you even know what is truth?

Diomedes answered, smiling:

— No, my friend, I do not know.

The conversation drifted and Christine had really not come. They went out, and dined together, now mute like good and reasonable animals.

While eating small birds, swathed in lard and robed in vine leaves, Diomedes regretted having a friend. During the two years that he had known him, Pascase had made him pay for a few hours of agreeable

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conversation by many vexations. Without doubt he was a man of sure character, but of an extravagant mind, one of these beings who go straight ahead impetuously and hit themselves against trees, failing to think that there are trees in the forest. A sullen and obstinate intelligence, an obscure and sentimental heart, unbridled logic, no pliancy, a bar of iron which breaks without bending: Diomedes really did not enjoy such a nature. The history of Christine also worried him, he saw no solution of it.

“Yet,” he mused, “it is rather diverting. A morbid or normal psychology? Morbid, since it is interesting. Besides which, the normal cannot be perceived as it cannot be differentiated. How distinguish from the eighth the ninth chime of twelve? Alone among the twelve the first and the last are dissimilar because they are either preceded or followed by silence. . . .

“But if Pascase be somewhat ill, perhaps am I somewhat faulty? We must see.”

He looked at Pascase and thought him less unpleasant.

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“After all a friend is useful to the mind as a garden is useful to children. The one like the others must be taken out and taken to play, and a friend’s brain is full of alleys and pleasant lawns. . . .”

At that instant, he looked again at Pascase and his own egoism almost frightened him. He resumed:

“But I am also a garden for him, and perhaps a park, a whole country where he can drive, shoot, pick fruit, make hay, harvest. There are a thousand ways to work or to divert oneself. Is it my fault that Pascase always leads the same idea, along the self-same lane?”

This reflection comforted him. Becoming quite amiable, he wished to make small talk, affectionately:

— Pascase, do you not find these birds very pleasant?

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BEE

*Then suddenly the bee was silent and with  
calmed wings drank the life of the human  
flower*

**I**T IS Mauve.

She had an air of complete whiteness, dulled whiteness, with her colourless dress, her calm eyes, her pale complexion. Without bursts of laughter, without liveliness, without any of her habitual insolences she had entered and already seated herself; as well behaved as a fine lady and with her parasol on her knees, she said:

— Tell me, Diomedes, is not Cyran a great painter? Diomedes acknowledged this willingly.

She continued:

— While meditating his painting, his lines, his colours as fresh as water, he speaks, he says admirable things, things which move

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ne heart, things which have made me think deeply. In his studio, but especially out here amongst the scaffoldings, enveloped in his long white robe, he is beautiful, he is sacerdotal, he is divine. One would say that he is going to paint the world over again, a world of harmony and grace, soft and clear. The pure bodies are seen through diaphanous veils, it signifies that one should let one's soul be seen so; that it should be beautiful enough for one not to blush at baring it.

— Mauve recites a lesson, said Diomedes.

— Mauve repeats Cyran's words because they please her.

— So the fine old man has charmed you?

— Neither by his beauty nor his old age; by his genius.

— And Mauve comes to confide in me? . . . Give me your lips.

Mauve gave them, then she said:

— Yes, take, while there is still time.

Diomedes listened, surprised. Mauve spoke with the gravity of a young Christian destined to martyrdom. She added:

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— Cyran conquered me in only one battle. I still resist, my flesh is in rebellion, but my soul is submissive. Diomedes, I am afraid of becoming an angelic creature.

— What will you do then with your beauty, little Mauve?

— I do not know. Nothing. Or perhaps I will give it to Cyran for him to put on the walls of churches.

— That is all he can do with it.

There Mauve was willing to laugh a little. She resumed:

— He confessed to me his slight shiver, the other evening, do you remember, when I was drinking him in. . . . He calls that temptation; I desired, it is true, I desired him ardently. I came home overjoyed and furious. I cursed you all three, even you, Diomedes. The next day, at seven, Tanche came to fetch me. I sat, I listened, and I am troubled.

— And Cyran? asked Diomedes.

— Cyran observes me. I think he loves me as some young animal, a kitten whose education is to be gone through with. He

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caressed my hips, gently, with a gesture innocent and absent-minded, then he began to draw and to talk.

— What about?

— Of everything that is white, of everything that is simple, of everything that is pure. I did not understand very well, but I was moved.

— Mauve, one is moved only because one does not understand very well. Emotion is a sentiment. And after?

— After, here I am. I seem a little foolish, don't I?

— Very little.

She rose, took off her hat and her gloves, and moved to the divan near Diomedes, gliding round him saying:

— I still love Diomedes.

— Still?

— Still and yet hardly, but still a little, enough to be his slave today. Tomorrow, perhaps not. . . .

Much amused at first by these devices by which Mauve assumed the attitude of a little victim, he brought her slowly out of



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her conceit. Mauve who generally liked to conquer let herself be conquered. Usually insinuating and imperious she dominated gently, interested by the successive capitulations, enjoying the hesitancies and shrinkings of her victim vanquished only at the moment when her will became inflexible

Her game was serried, sure and astute as that of an exquisite insect of adventure tightening around her prey the spirals of her flight. She sang like a bee. Then suddenly the bee was silent and with motionless wings, poised upon the flower, drank its nectar. Today, fearful, she was passive with no other desire than that of being agreeable to her friend.

Much had she loved Diomedes, who was always gentle and serviceable in things of love, and even patient, yielding willingly to the caprices of each feminine character, skilful in never asking from eyes aught save their natural smiles. With him, women, reassured, became almost sincere; confiding, they opened the closet of their vices, let him handle the gloves, laces, the

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feathers and the silks: the closet closed, one had enjoyed everything, daintily, without crumpling anything and all was in its place under the hand, for another time. He never seemed to despise them, either for the daring of their habits, for the ambiguousness of their gestures, or for the facility of their emotions. He did not believe that flowers are beautiful only because they are shut in behind railings, walls or ditches; the beautiful ones are so everywhere, in the forests, in the fields and even along the roadside; if a little dust sometimes powders them, they receive also all the benedictions of the rain of heaven and all the good fortunes of the sun. In fact, he was indulgent, having decided that after all if the free practice of love was a blemish for women, it should be one also for men. And if venality itself dishonours a woman who surrenders herself, does it not dishonour the man who accepts the transaction? Is it then more moral to buy than to sell a turpitude? But why turpitude? It is not disgraceful for a man to live by his intelligence; it is not disgrace-

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ful for a woman to live by her beauty. Mauve, who lived by her beauty, was therefore despised neither by Diomedes, nor by Cyran, nor by Pascase, nor by Tanche, nor by several other young men who breathed in her beauty willingly.

Yet before this lovely creature, but too well known, Diomedes for the first time let himself move to thoughts which were not of love. Languidly lying, her eyes closed, her hands under the nape of her neck, one leg folded and the other hanging, Mauve suddenly seemed to him useless in his life. What pleasure really did he find in kissing thus that small cold neck with kisses repeated and abrupt? He felt himself absurd for the space of a second, but Mauve, having perhaps felt the danger, drew him to her imperiously.

Her hair done, and gloved, she declared herself to be rather tired of her wanderings. Among the words of Cyran, there were several she had already heard inwardly.

— That explains to you, Diomedes, the emotion I felt. Although I have hidden

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the thought well, for long I have dreamt of having but one dress, one ring, one friend. Do you quite understand me, Diomedes?

For an instant, Diomedes believed himself the one friend elected by Mauve. He felt fear, foreseeing painful explanations. As he did not answer, she continued in a contrite voice:

—One will not recognise Mauve, she will be quite changed. Already today, I have been very different, have I not? Did I give you pleasure at least? No, Diomedes, I feel it, you have regretted the former Mauve. What will you? She is dead. I tried to bring her to life for you: perhaps I only evoked a ghost.

Diomedes was dismayed. He let her go without having found a last word really cordial.

Alone, he mused and understood why Mauve who had always been agreeable to him, had bewitched him so feebly today.

“Her thoughts were no more those which vivified her body when her body was pleasing to me. No more sensuality, no more

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beauty. Women are really beautiful only for those whom they desire.”

He mused again:

“But I shall almost weep for Mauve. We loved each other very well.”

And again:

“No, not very well. Illusion, play and a smile. But I deceived myself very gently with those small illusions, those little games, those little smiles. All that was amiable, easy, light.”

And again:

“With whom can Mauve be in love? With Cyran? What matter! I regret her. Yes, I will almost weep for her.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MOORS

*I divert words from their stream as one  
diverts rivers to throw them athwart the barren-  
ness of the moors where frail and pallid  
ideas blossom badly*

EXPLANATIONS about Cyrène? I do not know all her life and what I do know does not appeal to me especially; it is too like the text-book, too much what should happen. At this period of civilisation, every intelligent girl without principles could become a Cyrène, with variations. But she is alone and she reigns.

Thus spoke Diomedes, and Pascase listened carefully.

Seated at the terrace of a cafe, drinking strong violent alcohols, they waited the hour to call on this illustrious woman.

— We must excite ourselves somewhat,

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my friend, and acquire the illusion that we are about to enter into a pleasure. Let us feel this assurance. For me, who have certain special motives of anxiety. . . . No, let it be a question of you and not of me. To think of myself annoys and depresses me. . . . Cyrène is still very beautiful.

Pascase would have liked to know her age. Diomedes ignored this:

— But it is very difficult. The age of women? Does one know the age of horses? With bran mash, the clipper, care, rest, fine trappings and varnished hoofs, a horse is always young. The groom alone knows its age, or the veterinary. You must ask Cyrène's age of her lady's maid or her doctor. Let us put it as being her second youth. Exquisite period for a celebrated woman, for men are so vain that glory gives her again more beauty than years have taken from her. Thus the golden age of women on the stage is the moment when their heart is renewed and rejuvenated; pubescent youths are moved and gather



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round the priestess; she gives good advice and proceeds to the initiations; she is the mother, the mistress, and the professor; and with the authority of her name, her experience and her body macerated in essences, she rules over a whole generation of which she might be the grandmother.

Diomedes answered to an objection of Pascase:

— But, my friend, in beings richly endowed, the body alters only in extreme old age. Ninon and Goethe both, at the age of eighty, had kept from chin to heel all their physical harmony. . . .

However, here is part of her history: Little bourgeoisie and sentimental, she marries; no religion, no morality, a wavering sense of decorum, she is doomed to adultery. She falls into it and it astonishes nobody, not even herself. On the contrary, she is proud of it as of a distinction, an elegance conquered, which raises her above her sisters. Already she is no more the little bourgeoisie; she is the adulterous little bourgeoisie. Still rather foolish in spite of

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her intelligence, she glories in this somewhat common state, blossoms out, becomes prettier. The lover, flattered, but despising her (being a blockhead, and without remission) teaches her the whole gamut. She is expert in chromatics, she learns to enjoy her sex, to turn all her senses to account. And yet she dreams, her ambitious little heart beats and rings, she deems herself equal to the most celebrated, in brain, in beauty, in feminine industry, and she is nothing but the mistress of a little clerk. A crisis in which hazard decides. She might have met the rich man about town, the man who offers a pair of horses; she meets the man who writes in the newspapers; she will write. The man is old, powerful and base; he dictates, she writes; he speaks, she obeys. She has understood the importance of being co-adjutrix; humble and tractable, she awaits the succession. While learning her new profession, she is the counting house, for the journal belongs to the man: she pays by opening her bodice. The man dies,

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she weeps, she is celebrated. Since then—either in the papers she owns and directs, or in all the others—she has not ceased writing one single day of her life, even during her adventures and her vagrancies. In actual society, all other criteria failing, a writer is judged but by the abundance or the rareness of his copy; he who tarries at the end of the furrow to meditate is lost. One ploughs no more with oxen, one ploughs with steam. The typewriter will render great services to journalists; it will enable them to multiply their production without augmenting their general expenses. This is the ideal of all well-to-do commerce. Cyrène, who is rich and pompous, employs stenographers, she has three who change about and take turns, for she dictates as one speaks, as an active and voluble woman speaks, without ever stopping or thinking. An ordinary article does not take her more than twenty minutes, she can speak five or six articles every morning and would continue after lunch if the number of papers were large enough to cope with the fecundity

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of her genius. But still more admirable is the fact that in this work of staggering volubility there should never be either a ray of intellect or a phosphorescence of idea. It preoccupied me long; at last, as Newton discovered the system of the world by seeing an apple drop, I understood Cy-rène, one day, by watching the course of a stream.

— And to think that she is your friend, exclaimed Pascase.

— And she will be yours. She is amiable, witty and of an evident intelligence, but incapable of letting any of these gifts pass into her writings. I do not believe that she purposely abstains from showing her talent. She would have moments of forgetfulness, fits of absence. Never; it is impeccably fluid, and void. Talent moreover, and especially style, which is the primary condition of talent, is incompatible with her industry. There is nothing more fatiguing to a population of readers than style; a new metaphor troubles and irritates a simple uncultivated being; if he understands

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it, it gives him no pleasure, but he thinks the author presumptuous and is annoyed with him for having stayed for a second his eye and his mind; if he does not understand, which is more common, he becomes angry. It is very just and most reasonable. In a few centuries the whole world will think on that subject as the ordinary man thinks today. There will be no literature, no prose, no verse, and thought will express itself by following an exact dry formula that is purely algebraic. As there will be no more general ideas, all notion of supersensitiveness being abolished or considered as one of the symptoms of folly, it is very possible that our system of writing will be forsaken as being too slow. To men penned in, by science and socialism, in works and pleasures forethought and ordained once for all, a few ounces of ideas will suffice to expound the whole human thought, which will be brief; the physical necessities, the sexual desires, good, bad, rain, sun, cold, heat. I consider that with fifty graduated grunts and as many representa-

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tive signs, a group of socialised men will perfectly express all its genius. Until then, and from today on, we must admit the perfect uselessness of literature and of all the arts. The child or the weakling plays alone. Strong and ripe humanity will no more play at making rhymes, music or painting than a woman of seventy will play with dolls or “here we go round the mulberry bush.” Ah! my dear Pascase, how happy we are to be children!

— I should not detest, said Pascase, a more serious and better ordained humanity with less unexpectedness, less injustice.

— My dear fellow, your skin itches at the place of the collar. Injustice is one of the consequences of the exercise of liberty. It is more, it is the very work of nature, the very work of God. Fortune is an injustice, but beauty is a far greater one and far more serious, an essential injustice, as is intelligence, as are all the gifts which render a man superior. Let us be unjust, my friend, let us suffer from injustice, but let us be free. A rather ingenious fable

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has been written on that subject, perhaps you know it? . . . Moreover, what is injustice? Is it unjust that Cyrène should earn the salary of two hundred workwomen? I do not know and I do not care. She is the joy of the public; she has given pleasure to many men; she enchants youth by the magnificent amplitude of her charms. Her part is great. . . .

— You mocked me well, Diomedes, the day you invited me to try and please that old sinner. . . .

— Do be more Parisian, Pascase. I still invite you to please her. A woman of luxury, like Cyrène, has but the age you imagine her to have. Suppose, doubt, dream. Why should not her bodily form, harmoniously developed, still be pure? What do you know of it? Try.

— Cynicism, said Pascase.

— Yes, cynicism. Love contains only two terms: chastity and cynicism. All the intermediary is built of meanness, morality, hypocrisy. Love is bestial or divine.

— Diomedes, you exalt yourself towards



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paradox, which is your way of leaning towards the absurd and intoxicating yourself with deadly vapours. . . . Tell me rather: this Cyrène has known all trades?

— All women’s trades. None of these trades are dishonourable. Some delicious eels live in the mud during one season, the summer. . . .

— They retain its flavour. . . .

— So little that it is an incentive. Besides all these trades have nothing mysterious. They are easily reduced to one, only one: prostitution. My friend, do not shiver: it is the trade common to all. It is the trade of our bodies and that of our souls: and our whole senses do nothing but enjoy the universal prostitution of men, of beasts, of things and of God. Women, especially, are so well fitted for that: either the cell or the world.

—— You divert words from their normal and true sense. It is absurd. . . .

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— But, resumed Diomedes very gently, I divert words from their stream as one diverts rivers to throw them athwart the barrenness of the moors, where frail and pallid ideas blossom badly. . . . Your fields are inundated, the grasses rot under the stagnant pools, let me then water the sand and give back to the sun the muddy soil which gives you fever. You have the fever of morality and propriety, Pascase—and yet here you are seated at the terrace of a cafe, prostituted to all these feminine eyes. Look, this one desires you. She feigns to be interested in the bows of her shoes and she lifts her dress so as to awaken in you a sexual thought which is coupled with the one that the sight of your thick brown beard awakens in her obscure nerves.

— She wants a louis at least, replied Pascase.

— Perhaps, but that is not the essential. Rich, she would have offered you the same look, the same gesture and the same bounties. She sells herself because she is unable to give herself: you will understand

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today that saying which until now has seemed to you commonplace, or simply witty.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SWAN

*When she lifted one of her arms to stay the fan, one would have said a swan from the depths of the water draws up and shakes his flexible and white neck*

SLIGHTLY reclining in a bergère, Cy-rène waited. Standing by, two or three very young men were looking at her, saying futile things with emotion. Her arms bare, her shoulders veiled with a black lace scarf, her bosom somewhat revealed, all her beautiful body emphasized by the suppleness of the flimsy stuffs, she let herself be inhaled, smiling, throwing her head back, one hand resting against her cheek. and under the lace her armpit gleamed like the wing of a raven. Behind the adolescents' backs, hands were thrilled, one of these adorers, hitherto dumb, began to

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falter, his lips trembled, from being pale he became crimson. Cyrène said to him maternally:

—Child, you wished to pay me a compliment; it is paid. Give me my fan. There on the small table. . . . Thank you. . . . No, open it. . . . Fan me. Then, letting her arms drop and her lace scarf slip, she breathed deeply and her breasts swelled. When she lifted one of her arms to stay the fan one would have said a swan, from the depths of the water, draws up and shakes his flexible and white neck.

From the threshold Diomedes and Pascase had witnessed the scene of adoration, and the complacencies of the idol. They advanced; she rose to give her hand to Diomedes and at once drew him in to a corner.

— You know, Diomedes, I believe Cyran is coming.

— Are you sure?

— No, but Tanche promised me to bring him. And see, this telegram. . . .

She drew it from her bodice.

— If it had fallen, said Diomedes, whilst

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Elian's fan was making your heart expand,  
he would have thought . . . poor child  
. . . he would have grieved.

— I see him for the first time.

— Precisely, if he knew you, you would  
no longer have the power to grieve him.

— My friend, I should prefer to give him  
bliss.

— Ah, Cyrène, how I love you! Oh! ex-  
quisite friend!

— But read.

— “Think will come, all arranged dec-  
oration orphans.” Heavens, how miserly  
Tanche is! Explain.

— Very simple. Orphanage. Chapel.  
Have offered ornaments and Sina decora-  
tion. Cyran evangelises the walls, angels,  
clouds, souls.

— Redemption?

— Yes. Our Lady of the Redemption.

— Excellent vocable, but I meant atone-  
ment.

— Of what? Repentance? I do not repent  
even of you.

— Cyran does penance for two.

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— Poor Cyran. . . .

— Finish.

— Well, yes. I love him still. I love him and perhaps I have never loved any one else. I remember in the last days, we wept one whole night. What peace! The little sentimental bourgeoisie, as you say. . . . No, my friend. It was pure, it was vast, it was high. . . . We were on a mountain. . . . He stayed there alone, after having spurned me from his side. . . . Why? He was frightened. He thought I was incapable of being sisterly. . . . I loved him enough to sacrifice all to him. . . . Yes, all, even desire. . . . Let him carry the burden of all the sins his abandonment has made me commit!

— Do not say that, Cyrene; it is wrong.

— It is wrong, I do not deny it. But sometimes one really may curse those whom one still loves and who love no more!

— He has not forgotten you.

— I know it, but he is still frightened.

— Yes, and he is right.

— I thought him right, I confess; but



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what can I do? My trade bores me, I despise man and men despise me, although they fear me and desire me; so I lean towards new souls. . . .

— And new bodies. . . .

— It is refreshing.

— Your fan in Elian's hands, it was charming.

— And innocent.

— Cyrène, I know you. Elian will fall asleep here, his head on your shoulder. Is it the same fan?

— The same, said Cyrène laughing; the same and the same Cyrène.

Diomedes not having answered, Cyrène resumed:

— Here is the plot. Sina is coming, you will lead him to Cyran, you will conduct the conversation and be silent only when Cyran has accepted.

There will be years of work, joy and almost a fortune in store for him. Stupid and vain, Sina will pay whatever I wish. So I shall be well avenged. By me and without his knowing it, Cyran will have

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acquired more glory and all the money that has failed him since he renounced painting portraits and small pictures. You approve?

— Yes. You are beautiful.

Gently putting her hands on his shoulders, she kissed his brow.

Pascase was roaming. Diomedes introduced him and Cyrène bestowed everything, accustomed to see only suppliants or lovers in the unknown. She said:

— All that Diomedes arranges with Daniel.

Then:

— Ah, here is Tanche! Oh, all alone!

— This Daniel? asked Pascase.

— A secretary.

Tanche, with an uneasy look, was stroking his thin beard:

— He is there, in a carriage, with Pellegrin, whom I fortunately met and who is watching him.

At the last moment he felt a scruple.  
. . . If Diomedes?

— Diomedes, I entreat you!

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— Diomedes was willing.

Cyrène went round the room, having by chance taken the arm of Pascase, who drew himself up slightly intoxicated, proud and smiling. He recognised Elian, whom he had met with Diomedes, and gave him a little friendly nod.

As new as he was, Elian quite rejoiced over it.

And as yet Cyrène, in the midst of gestures and of words exchanged, turned her head at every instant towards the door, a movement which made lovely shades pass over her neck and her shoulders. Her pale skin was somewhat suffused with emotion, her voice was low and softened; she seemed more beautiful than on other evenings, the eyes of all were fastened upon her with joy.

Pascase, without understanding and without thinking, was enraptured by the feeling of her arm trembling under his; he pressed it slightly so as to feel more acutely the tremors of her flesh.

When they were at the other end of the

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drawing-room opposite the door, Cyran appeared.

There was a great silence and a great awe, for every one knew. Men who were seated rose, came forward and behind them came some young women, troubled by the sight of the master. He was recognised from his portraits.

Brusquely releasing Pascase's arm, Cyrène came forward, extending her hands, finding no words.

Cyran stammered;

— Dear friend, dear friend!

Seated, he was soon surrounded, but he said nothing, casting suspicious eyes around, wiping his forehead. For an instant he was busy smoothing a little rug with his foot.

At last he lifted his head; Diomedes was speaking to him of his frescoes.

He answered seemingly happy, carried back to the gestures of a painter, his thumb moved forward as if crushing colour, or with agitated fingers, as if drawing a general effect, marking off details. At the third of his disjointed sentences which were never

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finished, he felt at ease, that is to say alone. The audience having vanished, he saw only painting and described it.

His picture finished, he was silent and after a moment, having gazed long at Elian, asked him to sit for a head of Saint John the Baptist. Tanche took the blushing youth's address.

— Never professional models, resumed Cyran. They know how to take the attitude, that is true, but it is also what makes them so dangerous.

Art is killed by the models. . . . In Florence and everywhere, before Leonardo, one painted from wax dolls, especially the goldsmiths. . . . Even that was better than the model by trade. . . . A model is stupid and sanctimonious, especially the Italian. . . . The curled swarthiness, the long white beard, the Madonna with large, lowered eyelids. . . . Parisian, the male models look like scoundrels and the female like wantons.

Take people who pass, people who think, people who suffer. . . . I found an admirable Madonna, a woman met on a ship.

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. . . She sobbed whilst rocking a tiny child in her arms. . . . “Ah, monsieur, his twin sister has just died and he, he is so frail I fear to lose him also!” From her I painted the Madonna who weeps for the coming anguish, but her tears hold a smile for the present life. . . . She is admirable, admirable! There is the model: one gives an attitude, under the costume, and one copies. But it is the school of drawing! Art of today is terrific, the protected art. A few years past, Diomedes, who then frequented the studios, was able to identify all the pictures getting medals that year by the models who sat for them. A young Italian, called Giosue, then celebrated, figured in twelve canvases, he had even been put in the midst of a view of Normandy. . . . So, he added, looking at Elian, this young man will come? He must come. He has eyes that love and dream.

Elian was thinking of Cyrène: he worshipped her for having had at her house this joy and this self-exaltation.

Cyrène and Diomedes were bringing in  
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Sina, who had been found in the little card room, where he willingly lost large sums with the air of distributing gold to Roman clients.

The three men stayed alone. The plot was achieved. Cyran was conquered.

Meanwhile, further on, the crowd of adolescents and of young women had once more formed its circle around Cyrène. Women craved her as much as men; they felt themselves in turn lover or beloved near this creature to whom no voluptuousness was unknown. Kneeling at her side, Flavie was toying with the floating ribbons of her dress, at times resting her cheek on Cyrène's knees or lifting towards the black eyes her own, large, innocent and light-coloured. This scene, which confused no one, moved the tender hearts of the youths.

Pellegrin murmured some verses:

“Reines des soirs anciens, amantes immortelles.

Ces yeux où la beauté s'enivre d'être belle. . . .

Adorables caresses où les gestes d'amour

Sont doux comme des vagues et purs comme  
des plaintes. . .

Fleurs dont le vent du soir a rapproché les  
lèvres . . .”



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At that moment, little Aurèle of the long, childish hair, jealously seized Pellegrin's hand and drew him away:

“Say some verses for me, but others. . . . Those are beautiful, but I do not like them. One queen, one queen only. . . . A queen and her king. . . .

They went away, towards the small obscure rooms, under the sombre flowering of pale shrubberies.

Elian in turn, unnerved, sad and angry, withdrew. He met Pascase.

— She is, said Pascase, truly beautiful.

— She is diabolical, answered Elian. She is a harem. What a creature of love! A whole people of men and women would kneel as she passes. She is the flesh.

— In her gaze there is a temptation, resumed Pascase. And all is temptation around her—these young women perfumed with the ardent perfume of desire, these adolescents with their equivocal looks. . . . One hardly knows. . . .

Elian smiled disdainfully:

— I thought you a friend of the house.

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Pascase looked at the youth, understood, reddened and discovering Tanche, clung to him. He said innocently:

— Strange house. . . .

— Strange? Wherefore? Customs of the day. No astonishment is possible. Besides which, Cyran is there. Cyran purifies everything, Cyran will purify everything. Ah! he is rising. We must go. Are you coming? Come. You look sinister. I am not at ease myself. It needs the candour of Cyran or the irony of Diomedes to bear patiently the odour of that pen of goats—and kids. Cyrène is ruining and debasing herself. . . . But if you wish to see some one suffer more than we do, look at Néobelle. . . . There, that tall young girl who resembles Cyrène, but is even taller and more sumptuous. . . . It is said she is Cyrène's daughter and Sina's. Paternity or adoption, she is Sina—Marie-Néobelle de Sina. That name harms him. One thinks him a Jew. He is a Syrian. It is perhaps worse. Néobelle knows all and despises all, She has the innocence of the cross raised in the

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midst of the turpitudes and knaveries of the market-place. It is rumoured that she loves Diomedes. Now Diomedes never talks but of the adventures, ideas and amours with which he is willing to toy; on things essential to him he is silent. I suppose therefore. . . .

Cyran went out, having kissed Cyrène's hand with an air of affectionate ceremony; Tanche and Pascase followed him.

## CHAPTER X

### THE HANDS

*It would be better to have kissed only  
pure hands*

AT last you deign to know I am' here,  
and for you alone?

— Your mother, answered Diomedes,  
needed my words.

— Do not call her that. It is painful to  
me. She is to me a suffering elder sister  
rather than a mother. . . . You know well  
that I call her Cyrène as every one does,  
as you do. Enough. And my letter?

Diomedes was troubled. He mused  
rapidly:

“Should he have read it? If yes, it is  
too late; if no, it is right.”

Néobelle's eyes betrayed nothing. They  
waited.

Diomedes offered the letter, turned over

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and twisted on all its surfaces, on all its angles.

“I look like a juggler,” he thought. “Shall I swallow it or have it disappear through my hands?”

He said:

— Here it is. It is intact.

Very pale, Néobelle answered coldly:

— I thank you. One can confide in you. You are discreet.

Diomedes understood, despised himself, then felt a sense of anger:

— I have been stupid. But why this game?

Néobelle shrugged her beautiful shoulders slowly.

— I do not know—I am bored. I thought you would have guessed. . . .

She held the letter between slightly contracted fingers. Diomedes wished to take it back:

— No, it is too late.

She folded it into a narrow slip.

— Where shall I put it? In my glove it would make a lump on my arm. It would

## "THE · HORSES · OF · DIOMEDES"

be very ugly, wouldn't it, my friend? No. On my bosom, there, on the soft skin of my breast. And if it scratches me, Diomedes, if presently I find the envelope stained with blood, I will send you the little hair shirt, the small relic. Is that the way to say it? I have a fragment of the blood-stained tunic of Sainte Prase. When I look at it in its tiny golden heart of antiquated form, I am not moved. But perhaps your soul is more sensitive? . . . Tell me now why have I not seen you for so long? Why have you been a bad friend, Dio?

She spoke in endearing and saddened tones, her whole beauty as if veiled in bitterness.

Her magnificent body seemed to withdraw from the gaze, vanish, melt in a sorrowful radiance. She had folded about her the black lace fallen from Cyrène's shoulders; through the transparent veil her clear skin designed pink flowers.

Seated on a stool, close to her, Diomedes looked at her, unable to find words. He

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listened vaguely to the thin music of the waltzes that came through the portières from the neighbouring drawing-room to die within their hearing. After a long silence he answered, his mind awakening to Néo-belle's question:

—I am not a bad friend, Néo, but weary from having plucked too many flowers without fragrance, I demur at spanning the river at passing on to the other shore, on that shore whence come, I know now, the perfumes which intoxicated my ignorance. When I started, in the early morning, the sun was laughing through the willows; there was dew on the grass and already wasps in the fruits. It was a morning in August; it was my spring-time; I have known no other. I plucked daisies and gentians, and all the weakened flowerings of too hot summers and inhaled them with joy, but the fragrance which consoled me came from further, from far away. . . . I must span the water; where is the boatman? And how return if the flower that I see and crave for is but a delusion? . . .



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— The fairy Morgana on Lake Lemman, said Néobelle. I have seen her, it is not very strange. But if you desired her really, Diomedes, the fairy, the flower or the flame, she would spring up before you with her real flesh of woman, flower or fairy. She would come to you. . . . She would save you from spanning the river. . . . She would spare the beatings of your heart—and of your fear. . . .

— I do not fear the river, Néó, I fear you.

— No, Diomedes, you fear yourself. You are afraid of your desires, afraid lest they swell up, fantastic beasts, with jaws and nails; afraid of emotion; afraid of sentiment; afraid to live. . . .

— But I do live, and richly; I walk, I dream, I lend myself to fantasies. . . .

— You always lend yourself, that is it, you never give yourself.

— To be free, to be free!

— Free in the desert of your unrealisations! Free in the midst of the sands, or amidst the dust of the sands, or amidst the dust of barren roads. Free and alone!

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— Alone? Yes, I am alone. In all conversation I am alone, in all intimacy I am alone. I am alone when I touch the hand of a friend or the knees of a woman, alone when I speak, alone when I listen, and alone when I scream. It is true, but who then, if he thinks, does not live in eternal solitude?

— You might perhaps love, my friend? said Néobelle softly.

— The river! answered Diomedes. Always the river, wave or shadow in which one must throw oneself, naked.

— Naked, Dio! Quite naked, stripped of your little dreams, your little fantasies, your little sensations, your little irony. . . and thus unladen you will easily reach the other shore, and there you will kneel down.

— Kneel down?

— Kneel down like a child.

— Like a child?

— Yes, Dio, like a little child. I have never seen that in my surroundings. There are no prayers in the atmosphere I breathe. I have never heard any hymns, but only the call of flesh . . . The same must ring

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out in the night, in the wilds. . . Screams of the beasts, exhausted, ill and moaning. . . One does not know whether they moan for shame or pleasure. . . Is love then but one of the forms of contempt?

— Ah, Néo, contempt plays an important part in love. Without it the majority of sensual meetings would be inexplicable. It is for man such a pleasure to play the beast, to wallow in the litter of instinct, to enclose his ideal in the narrow limits of the mere physical, to make of it a prison and only to lift his head up to eyes that he may read in them the satisfaction of a forfeiture. . . But others cannot raise their head when the excess of shame entrances their nerves and they die there choked in their stupor. . . Beauty is no more than a promise of pleasure, it is nothing more than the playings of hands and lips, the immediate and banal joy of touching. Souls have become blind and there is no more infinite in the gaze of men or in the breasts of women. . .

He was silent, then added:

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— You make me say what I think, Néo. This is almost an avowal. Usually I am silent, or if I speak, it is with indulgence, indulgence I need myself. And besides, to what purpose this confession and this anger? No, not anger. I do not wish to hate life. . . . One must go out, one must walk; therefore, let us like the scenery of our wanderings; our love will perhaps make it beautiful. I have purified very ugly things by looking at them with innocence. Good-will sanctifies even the accomplishment of evil; there is more virtue in certain bad actions than in certain good works. . . . And yet, it would be better to ignore it, it would have been to have closed one's eyes from time to time along the pathway . . . it would be better to have kissed but pure hands.

— Look, here are my hands, Dio!

And with the consciousness of her real candour, Néobelle tearing off her gloves extended her two pale hands to Diomedes' lips.

Excited by his discourse, moved by the beauty of this chaste maiden, so ardently

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a woman and so coldly virginal, he kissed the proffered hands with more love than he had yet given to other flesh.

Néobelle gazed at him with eyes passionate but calm.

— Dost thou love my flesh, Dio?

— Néo, I love thee!

Standing and leaning over her, Diomedes searched her lips. She refused them and rose:

— No, not the lips. Lips give; I will not give. . . .

And resisting Diomedes' efforts she said again:

— I will not give, not yet, not yet. . . .  
But all that does not give. . . . Look, my arms! Look, my shoulders! . . . Ah, thou dost love my flesh, Dio! Has it the savour of the infinite? Has it the savour of honey or of the firmament? Ah! Dio!

Exalted, she laughed a passionate laugh. Her eyes were flashing, almost cruel.

She seemed to offer herself with revolt, to fight in vain against her words and her gestures. Twice her hand clutched her bodice, nervously catching at the drapery.

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— The letter, the letter, Néó, the letter!

She seized it, gave it to Diomedes.

— Yes, read it now. Ah, there is blood, a little blood, a tiny drop of blood, one drop only. . . . So I give thee my blood! Dio, what wilt thou give me?

— Myself, answered Diomedes simply.

— Thou hast said it. Thou belongest to me.

In a moment of exaltation, Diomedes lifted the letter to his lips and kissed the stain of blood.

— Kiss also the wound, Dio!

But no sooner had she felt the caress, than she recoiled.

Folding the black lace scarf round her shoulders, she fled.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE BARGE

*I wish to spring unto another vessel and to  
have the old barge sink with all my sins.*

SEATED in the arm-chair which Néobelle had just quitted he mused, clasping the letter between his fingers, surprised at having abandoned himself so frankly to pathetic discourse and gesture. But so many emotions, both modes, sensual and sentimental, had wearied him as much as long wanderings among conflicting sorts of scenery would have done. He mused without thought, numbed rather into a pleasant fatigue, uneasy and yet satisfied as if with a victory.

Soon he ceased even to muse. He perceived near the sounds of dancing. Astonished that no couple should have attempted to intrude into a corner so well known and



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where so many shoulders had been kissed perhaps greedily, he went to lift the tapestry which separated the little, solitary drawing-room from the others. The door was locked. The other one, that which gave directly on to the ante-chamber and by which Néobelle had disappeared, remained open. Servants were half asleep. On the tables there lay the few remaining coats, from which he chose his own. The music ceased, people came out; he retreated, not wishing to see any one.

At the same instant the locked door opened and Cyrène appeared.

— I knew you were there. I was watching you. How I must love you, Diomedes, to leave you locked in alone with my daughter.

— Any one might have come in by the other door.

— No, this evening the inner door was open only from within.

— I am just as pleased not to have known all that beforehand, resumed Diomedes. Néo knew it?

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— No, I did it all. I know you love each other and it ~~pleases~~ me.

— She is really your daughter?

— My real daughter. — You would prefer not?

— Almost.

— She is so little like me. In stature and figure and that is all. I adore her and she despises me. If she had my disposition, she would love me. . . . It is better thus. . . . Néo is an admirable creature before whom I kneel, dazzled and faltering. I adore without understanding. . . . You alone perhaps could unravel that hieratic writing. . . . One does not know what she wishes. . . . In a word—she loves you. . . .

— Yes, resumed Diomedes very simply, I believe she loves me.

— And you?

— I, I am crushed. I await the stroke of mercy — and mercy. . . .

— Ah, be witty, the joy and life of an unhappy girl depend on you. She offers you all her beauty and all her heart.

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—Oh, don't be sentimental, Cyrène. Have the modesty of sentiment; that is what I call being not sentimental, and let me love with irony if such be my manner of loving.

Women, said Cyrène, have no modesty. You know it, without doubt, better than I do, but modesty is the last thing of which they are capable. To speak of love is to them perhaps more pleasing than to love. Do you really believe that I can love Cyran secretly? No, I wish to scream my feelings for him, spread them, expose them — on every wall, on my forehead and on his. I am happier in having seen him one hour ceremoniously in my house than to have passed eight days of solitude with him. The world knows he left me; the world knows it grieves me; the world will know that we have met. . . .

Cyrène was silent for a moment; then she resumed:

—He has taken the first step; he will take others. I wish to die near him. . . . I am no more such as you think me and such

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as I seem, Diomedes; and if I wish to be loved again by Cyran (loved the way he wishes) it is to be able to appear at least such as I have become. . . . The adolescents, Diomedes, youthful charmers and young sirens, I would so wish to escape them! I feel I am losing myself my barge is sinking; the water is blue and warm but deep; I will disappear wholly. . . . No, I wish to live, and remain beautiful and proud; to leave the world and not be left by the world. I wish to spring unto another vessel and to let the old barge sink with all my sins; they are heavy, it will touch the bottom. On the other vessel I shall establish myself very sensibly but with great dignity, as a queen who has just abdicated but who keeps her royal habits and demeanour. Have I not reigned truly over a whole people? By my beauty and by my loves? Yes, by that almost alone, for the rest would have been nothing without the scandal of my life.

— Ah, Cyrène, is it then the hour of flagellation?

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— It would have struck already but Cyran delayed the clock.

— You will be regretted.

— And I leave no heiress.

— I hope not, answered Diomedes.

Cyrène looked at him without anger:

— That is the first touch of the lash; continue.

— Hardly—a small silken cord, my friend. Send me away.

— Everything is closed, said Cyrène, you will pass through my room and the small staircase.

— No, that would be too much temptation.

He followed, however, troubled, fearing the weakness of the flesh; but Cyrène, crossing the room without hesitation, had already opened the hidden door. Diomedes, through instinct or remembrance, glanced towards the bed, the place of which he knew. It was open and in the dim light he thought he saw a head bury itself in the pillow. Then, in a fit of hypocritical indignation—for would he, Diomedes, have resisted the

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violent arms?— he railed at Cyrène and in a low voice, as she held a light for him on the staircase:

— Cyrène, you contradict your own words. Who is there?

Cyrène answered coldly:

— Elian.

— Then all you said to me?

— I shall renounce myself but in the security of my heart.

— Sacrifice that.

— Diomedes, I entreat you.

— But why give me this exhibition and force me into an absurd part? Here I am moralizing, at two in the morning, on the third step of the stairway which leads to the alcove. I am inclined to laugh. . . . It is true you are free, but to believe you, Cyrène, to believe you!

— If I had so willed, it would be you who would be in the alcove.

And to punish Diomedes, leaning over him, she touched his forehead with her bare shoulder.

Diomedes went down one step.

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— Go away.

— Sacrifice Elian.

— I leave you.

— I shall believe you no more.

— He is the last one, Diomedes. Still that one, I longed for Elian, he is the last.

— And Flavie?

— A bagatelle.

— Sacrifice Elian.

— No, my friend, I wish to choose my last word. Good-night.

She went back. Diomedes heard the rattling of the locks.

Then he walked back up the four steps, and listened.

Elia when the first lock rattled had come to meet her and there close to the little door there was a slow, measured embrace with the sound of crushing silks and rapid caresses. He heard Cyrene whisper a suggestive word. Then it seemed to him that she carried the boy off in her arms

He mused while the street door was being opened for him:

“Cyrene has come to the point of finding



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excitement in a vulgar expression. . . .  
I pity her — However, it goes with her  
age.”

Then further.

“Decidedly the loves of others are very  
uninteresting.”

## CHAPTER XII

### PERFUMES

*That perfume of lavender and nuts  
untroubled by male touch*

DIOMEDES awakened in the sunshine and had, before any thought, the feeling of happiness. It was warm; the curtains smiled on the clear panes; he rose, walked unclothed. Flowers bloomed naively in a bowl; green plants spread their leaves, their stalks bent under clusters of blossoms.

He was for some time content thus, free and attentive to the humming peace of the spring-like morning. Having opened a window giving on nothing, on summits of trees, on the heavens, he stood erect, divinely proud, on the threshold of renewed nature.

Then, his state of nudity inclining him towards other thoughts, he understood the

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cause of his joy, ran towards his clothes, opened the letter with haste. It was still fragrant with a perfume of flesh; he read it standing amongst the flowers and the leaves that softly brushed his skin. Four pages well filled and as if adorned with arabesques. He found this straight writing, full of loops, noble, cordial, sensual also in the undulating curves of the dashes, which seemed to prolong the words like kisses; which folded themselves back like arms, to keep longer the delight of the idea. The avowals did not surprise him, of the restrictions and doubts he had but an indistinct perception; all that was neither desire nor gift was swamped in the remembrance of recent ecstasies.

His happiness was heightened by the certitude of dominating this superb creature henceforward; she had come to him, stripped of her pride and almost of her dress, torn in sign of submission. . . . Moved, he gave himself the promise to be for Néo a magnificent friend, an ardent and sentimental treasure diffused as a rain of summer

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over all her body and even over the obscure depths of her verdant soul. He loved her under the form of a young, fresh, strong, and leafy tree, which one clasps, of which one plucks a branch, at the foot of which one lies in a fragrant and warm shade. She gave him the sensation of firmness, of security, and from dreaming of the young tree with a verdant soul, he saw himself, rooted to the same soil, quivering in the morning wind, swooning in an entwining of boughs, fraternal and voluptuous.

Suddenly he desired her. The pathetic scenes of the night reascended slowly to his eyes, then redescended along his nerves, draining the blood from his arteries, closing the maddened gates of his veins; he recalled, almost swooning, the golden arms in which the blue lines coursed like waves, the gently sloping shoulder, the large deep bosom. rendered whiter by the contrasts of its setting; and he breathed in that perfume of lavender and nuts, as yet untroubled by male touch.

The sun disappeared behind a cloud;

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Diomedes dressed himself, recovered his calm and his lucidity, but still following the same train of thought, he discoursed inwardly on the peculiarity and the diversity of feminine perfumes, their part in the things of love, the absurdity of wedding a woman without having inhaled the fragrance of her flesh. He then understood the usefulness of balls, amused that racial exigencies should have imposed upon the most chaste of maidens the offering of themselves, open flowers, to the discreet pursuings of the suitors. Going even further, he admitted the necessity of the majority of traditional customs, even those of which the significance is forgotten: thus, sea bathing and the semi-nudity of the beach—it was the revenge of natural immodesty on the imprisoning of bosoms and arms, on the length of skirts, on the deceit of dresses and bodices. A people accustomed to a certain nakedness would bathe in a sweating room and not in the hard and treacherous water of the ocean. But it is necessary that women, the matrix of the

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race, should disrobe at least once a year under the eye of the males. Stronger than all religions, than all moralities, instinct commands and modesty obeys.

Reflecting on his recent conversation with Pascase he regretted not having proved to him that the dress of a young girl, after three or four years of balls and sea-side pleasures, covers but a flesh as well known as a whole to the eyes, the hands, of male intuition as the public flesh of the model or the courtesan.

And yet, he did not condemn either the morality or the modesty, or the struggle against nature; to him this perpetual state of oscillation between the animal instinct and human instinct was interesting; the work of geniuses, training collar and neck-lace ornament singularly happy and significant. . . .

“It is the frontal of the high-priest, the sign of election. Such as he has become, man is a being opposed to nature: in that is his beauty. But it is not a bad thing that nature should sometimes recall him to his

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origin, bend him towards her firm breasts and her hips of stone, so that he should rejoice to be a man and not an animal. Oh, how unnatural Néo really is! It is not natural that a woman should be beautiful, fair and somewhat golden. It is her soul that renders her beautiful, the obscurity of houses and of clothes that makes her fair, the hothouse of civilisation that discolours her hair and gives the pale colour of amber to the down of her arms, smooths her skin, and has made of all her body a thing of softness. . . . The men of our race who should live nude would acquire the colour of old red copper kettles, and the women who ever are our joys would resemble the water-men who empty sand-filled boats along the river.”

Diomedes smiled at the thought of the naive draughtsmen who illustrate pre-historical novels with small Praxiteles, or set lilacious bosoms and pure shoulders blossoming amongst the stench of putrid viands on the outskirts of the caverns. He smiled also at the thought of the writers.

“Animal beauty is natural. Human

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beauty is not natural. It is an invention slowly perfected, one of the visible works and the masterpiece of intelligence.”

Having breakfasted, he read the letter over. Then the doubts and reticences assailed him, bursting like a seeding of ink stains amongst the cordial arabesques. He suffered.

“Have not the gestures and the words of yesterday evening effaced the little ink stains? All this retraction of herself, and this dividing in two beings, one of blood, the other of soul,—is it anything else but the gesture of lowering her dress when the passer-by gazes with too strong desire at the limbs of the passing woman?

“Her fichu crossed doubly on her breast? But she tore it herself, tearing all the lines of the letter by which she denied her love.”

And little by little, he was comforted.

Fear dominated him no longer. The gloomy bird which hovered over his head had fallen at his feet, wings closed, but the creature, still palpitating, writhed, and its feathers fluttered.



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He felt that in himself a great renewal was about to take place, that the manifold horizons which stayed his amused gaze were about to be veiled in mist, one only remaining clear in the universal twilight.

Then he wished for himself the power requisite to suffer this darkness and this anguish, watchful to see whether Néobelle would be resplendent enough to illuminate, a unique star, the world of his thoughts, of his desires, and of his dreams.

The knowledge of this singular maiden, of dissimilar purposes, was still confused in his mind, impressed with enthusiasm but not freed from all egoistical apprehension. Bee, wasp, or drone, would she not convey to his brain illogical germs and prepare there in the secrecy of the gynæceum anomalous fecundations and an illusive posterity?

“She will wish to substitute for my lingering and ironical pleasures felicities too certain and too precise, for she must have, being a woman, a practical and fixed

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goal in life,— and I, I only desire to live a little, a little at a time, sparing my nerves and my sensitiveness, my whole intelligence folded and unfolded slowly, according to the opportunities of prey, like the lazy vertebræ of a large serpent that seems to sleep amongst the reeds. . . .

“To play with life, to play with ideas, to have two or three principles, solid but netted as a racket, so that everything should pass through save the essential. . . . And what is essential except accomplishing one’s salvation, according to the very noble Christian expression, that is to say, to realise oneself according to one’s nature and according to one’s genius? . . . If that alone is essential, I will love Néobelle, whatever happens; the pilgrim who travels in the snow must love the house which opens at his call and the hearth which kindles for his wet limbs. . . .

“But the house should not be divided into two halls, one ardent and the other morose; there should be but one flame, one table, one bed and the smile of the woman should

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acknowledge an intelligent sensuality and all the spiritual refinements. . . .”

Here his meditations were interrupted by the arrival of Pascase. Diomedes, once more, was pleased by it. The whirlwind of ideas was stayed. Pascase was satisfied and irritated. Softened by the promises of Cyrène he still revolted against the immoralities with which he had come in contact. Knowing beforehand the tenure of all pleadings in the moral theme, Diomedes listened with indifference. At the end he retorted:

—Two or three times in a century, one changes or one cleans the glass panes of the hothouse in which one lives. At first the more luminous light enables us to see more closely and to understand more clearly the playings of our morals, but little by little the rain and the dust dull the panes; they become lined with moss; flies multiply their shadows and their specks; first comes opacity, then almost night. . . . But be it clear or dark, morals are always the same, for the same sexes

## “THE · HORSES · OF · DIOMEDES”

dance the same roundelay, in the same world.  
. . . You live at a time when the panes have just been changed (or cleansed), the light is clear, your eyes have all their clairvoyance — and you sincerely believe that Elian and Flavie are exceptional little monsters endowed with a special mission on an earth threatened with catastrophes and conflagrations. . . . Jehovah himself was thus mistaken when he destroyed the towns which he wished to curse, but experience has doubtless taught him, or perhaps indulgence, since he looks upon Paris without anger . . . .

— What do you know of it? said Pascase.

Diomedes continued gently:

. . . and perhaps smiling. I believe that God has become, as we have, indulgent. Have you noticed, Pascase, the kindness of God and his infinite patience in modeling his divine soul on the human soul? His thoughts always conform to those of the thirty intellectual, righteous men who govern the world without the world observing it, themselves led in their course by a chosen

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one who often remains ignored by men. God has thought as Pythagoras, who is now but a name; as Saint Bernard, whose ideas shock us; as Spinoza, whom no one has read. . . . God is alive, Pascase. He is truly the Eternal. He is transformed without losing a particle of his divinity, and phoenix, he bursts forth always, although different essentially like himself, from the pyre where burns the intellectual flame.

Introduced to an idea, Pascase how to be at home therein. He said:

— Your way of explaining God is equivalent to denying him. . . .

— Oh! what more candid assertion? I have the faith of an old woman. . . .

But Diomedes smiled slightly.

— I believe God immutable, resumed Pascase; perhaps indulgent, perhaps patient. . . . But I believe also, and it is one of your sayings that I have meditated on, that at certain hours in the centuries he ceases to look, that is to say, to think the world. Then the divine slowly ebbs from human souls. The fragrance of the infinite

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abandons the creatures; the perfume which had impregnated the earth returns to its source, and souls close themselves as the blossoms of the convolvulus close at night. It is the interreign. Sometimes I dream that perhaps we are living at such a period. The night is soft but dreary, the grasses sway under the mist, the leaves are silent, the moon sleeps and the stars are sad. God is thinking other worlds.

Diomedes thought this very beautiful, very terrifying:

—What a subject for dreams, Pascase! This universe delivered up to laws, to the brutal causality, to the implacable rule of affinities and repulsions, to Force, that is to say, to Stupidity! In short, a universe without Intelligence, which is the perpetual negation of Law, which is love, which is bliss, which is the sword against which the imbecile Force rushes and pierces itself!

—That state of horror, said Pascase, is agreeable to many men. After all, it is the scientific conception of the world. It is perhaps the true one.

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— Perhaps, answered Diomedes sadly. Besides which, the thought of a man binds but one man. There are many truths. Some live, others are dead; the others will die. . . . But according to that system, Pascase, if you adopted it (which would surprise me), on what would you establish the basilica of your good mother Morality?

— On nothing. It would even be absurd to try to lay its foundation stone.

Diomedes resumed:

— Pascase, is not all this in the main somewhat indifferent to you? Would you not prefer to kiss the hair of little Flavie?

— No, it is too short.

— Short, but pretty and fine. Yet you are right, for she would refuse your man's lips. Flavie has principles, she will die virgin of male caresses. These aberrations are not unpleasant as are those of Elian. And besides, he is mercenary. . . .

— Oh!

— Yes; it is ugly and very squalid, but illnesses also are ugly yet must be touched. My friend, if one wrote something of our

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life, could one deny that we have lived, we who are innocent of such low vices, amongst the Elians with curled locks? Should one refrain, in depicting a forest scenery, from painting toadstools because they are poisonous? My character does not allow indignation. I am curious and not a moralist; I practise anatomy and not medicine. I wish to know how the heart of the animal is rooted; I do not draw up prescriptions.

While dining, they were occupied with the work that Pascase could accept in the newspapers ruled by Cyrène, and Diomedes smiled at the eagerness of his friend to introduce himself into a milieu which he despised.

He mused:

“He also is mercenary, and yet he is the most honest man in the world and the purest of hearts.

“All is but irony.”



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE LAMB

*And its name is Lamb*

IN the morning, Diomedes had just risen when someone rang; the little bronze bell with its soft, pure tinkling, shivered, distraught; and at the same time the door groaned under repeated knockings.

It was Cyran, always announced in this violent and tyrannical manner.

A lamb bleated in his arms.

— It is my lamb for John the Baptist. It was brought to me from the country, two or three days ago, but dirty, its wool all knotted and smelling of the sheep-pen. It is a small male; I had it washed like a dog,

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by the man with a recruiter's cap on the river bank. The man wanted to shear it! Poor lamb! It is housed in the rue Blomet, at a cattle feeder's, who brings it to me every morning. It breakfasts with me—milk and a few lettuce leaves. And its name is Lamb. It shall be made into a ram with fine crumpled horns. Feel there, near the ears, the two little knots, hard already. Don't you think it bleats lovingly? It is so white!

Then, lighting his pipe, Cyran spoke in changed tones:

—The other evening, whilst talking, I looked, I observed, interested by the youth of the faces, the brightness of the eyes, scarcely wondering, that the women should have short hair and the men long locks. There are modes and affectations of vices. It is indifferent to me as, outside of absolute chastity, all, hereafter, seems ugly. Moreover, I soon ceased to ponder. In presence of faces I am the painter. I spoke of models, I examined heads, seeking the character

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which would suit my door. My Saint John is painted on the interior door of the sacristy. It is he who opens the door from inside on the outer world so that from the secret life Jesus should pass into public life and to the sacrifice — consequence of every life dedicated to the people. It is perfectly clear, though the guardian brother could not understand the symbol of my door, and especially the lamb marching, resolute and proud in its gentleness, before the prophet. And yet, the lamb must not be carried; it must advance willingly toward the knife of the sacrificer. . . . Lastly, wishing for an adolescent Saint John and not a withered old hermit, I singled out a youth called Elian. . . .

He is a dissolute madman and not interesting. But what means his allusion to Cyrène?

Diomedes, hesitatingly, answered:

— If it is not true, it is possible.

Then again after a silence:

— Besides, Cyrène is lost. She knows it.

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Her nerves have taken such a habit of pleasures. . . . It is the drunkennes of excess. . . . Had she remained with you and become your wife, she would now be the friend of your evenings and the companion of your days, happy to mix your colours and hand you your paintbrush. . . . Yes, she is a terrible sinner. . . . Now, why should you not come to her rescue in a brotherly way?

Cyran seemed shocked at this discourse, which evoked too clearly to his mind a too well known past. Diomedes felt himself clumsy and almost infamous. Cyran objected:

— But I do not wish to marry. I am a monk. An old mistress? No. A passing liaison. I had a great tenderness for her, it is true, at the time when I was, I also, a scandal. . . .

— Cyrène has been so beautiful and she is still so beautiful that all is forgiven her resumed Diomedes. The world, in spite

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of its increasing stupidity, admits perfectly that a woman like Cyrène should have other claims in life and on life than a woman of whom virtue is the only grace. Her existence will have been a broad pompeian fresco, somewhat lascivious, somewhat voluptuous, but of vivid colours and softened flesh. . . . And then she cares for you. Did you not feel her emotion the other evening?

— I fear her love, answered Cyran. She will wish to obtain of me (and it would be her right) embraces I desire no longer. I admire the hips of a model without any more feeling than the hind-quarters of a horse, with the same æsthetic good-nature. The skin of a woman is now to me nothing but a very fine raiment, and if it is stretched over pleasant curves I am satisfied and that is all. . . . But with a creature whom I loved, whom I inhaled, whom I drank in. . . . I am troubled, my dear Diomedes. Who will paint my pictures if I make love?

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Diomedes, amused by this controversy, insinuated:

—Painting is not incompatible with love.

—My painting? Absolutely. For my art to remain spiritual and intellectual it is necessary that my life should be immaterial. If I touch life, if I am absorbed by the flesh, I feel I shall return to my realistic vomit.

How many years I have lost loving appearances, copying muscles, tones, glimmerings, drawing mouths that speak, bosoms towards which lips are strained! What is the use? The most direct realism, the surest, the most palpable, goes, flees shamefacedly before nature. Perhaps is it a useful art, a documentary art? . . . Costumes interest the future historian, and clever people dissert on the colour of hair in Italy at the time of Veronese. . . . One must deform or transform. . . . I transform. I free bodies from all materiality; of these, I make clouds, vapours, dreams, souls. . . .

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To lighten and lengthen, to obtain frail and transparent beings. . . .

— And the lamb? asked Diomedes, who cared but moderately for Cyran’s later painting and smiled sometimes at his theories.

— Lamb? He shall be tall and very slender like a greyhound, with a small fine head childish and pained, and golden rays bursting from the absence of his horns.

Diomedes admitted this vision, but although despising himself somewhat, he said to fulfil his promise to the end:

— She agrees to all self-denials, to a mystic marriage.

— In what will she find the strength to renounce herself?

— In her love of you.

— Perhaps. . . .

Diomedes added:

— Think, a mystic marriage, purely white, angelic nuptials.

This idea fascinated Cyran’s imagination, become somewhat childish. He recollected

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edifying lives of saints, the vows of chastity formulated by new spouses still hand in hand receiving the priest's benediction.

— Like Cécile and Valerian. . . .

But he resumed:

— Cécile was pure, Valerian was young; their sacrifice was great, perhaps cruel. Mine would be peaceful, my friend. . . . Frescoes are to me admirable and chaste spouses, giving me perfect joy. You must not compare me to Valerian, or compare Cyrène to Cécile. . . . One cannot even think of Philémon and Baucis, which is still admirable, but of an old misanthropist, ill, nervous, and of a woman less illustrious in virtue than in beauty and esprit, and who tomorrow will be old; saddened, and ugly. To die alone, that is the question and that is the horror. . . . Without doubt, but it is perhaps more beautiful. . . .

“He was found dead, paint brush in hand, lying at the feet of the lamb who seemed. . . .” What? . . . I wish to paint until my last breath, souls, clouds, incense, white, white things. . . . Come to see me



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one of these days. . . . I paint everything at a time. The procession of souls, Saint John, the Annunciation. All is begun, all. . . . To induce Lamb to stand erect, one holds out to him a salad leaf steeped in milk. . . .

Well, my friend, come with her if you wish. . . . She will see my souls, she will see what women have become for me, she will see how I understand life. . . . Souls, souls unto my last hour! . . . Adieu.

And, lifting the lamb in his arms, he went, like the Good Shepherd.

When Cyran had left, Diomedes, with sorrow, calculated his age, but he only arrived at “almosts.”

“He must be even older than he admits. . . . His was a great brain. . . . He still has hours. . . .”

And Diomedes thought of the truly beautiful life of that man, ever untroubled by ambition or fortune. He had never departed from art but to beg nobly by some passing work his daily bread; his entrance into glory had been slow, pro-

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cessional, hieratic: never a gesture to please the people, or a smile towards the Jews, detainers, and dealers in sacred vessels, or a step towards laurels, wreaths, and flowers, but rather towards the reed, the sponge and the gall that men's hatred pours for those who are the nobility of humanity.

Diomedes, who had always been filial, but not servile, began to doubt of his authority to urge him still towards Cyrène and towards such a risk. He was glad that Cyran had resisted and, admitting his objections, he resolved not to attempt tearing them away if his advice were again solicited.

Cyrène had in herself such a vast seduction! He tried in vain to analyse it. The stills cracked, burst with blinding jets of steam. It was impossible to discover either the courtesan, or the great lady, or the “muse,” but a curious being containing some of all this and the whole of it deadly in the smallest doses with all the charm of opium and of the most delicious poisons.

No woman better justified Diomedes’

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ideas of the part played by contempt in love. Vice worshipped in her an ugliness hidden under animal beauty, the grace of wantonness and sterility. Her mind, even, seemed physical—one inhaled it as a perfume in which something bodily lingers; her smile was softly enveloping and her laughter a caress. In Cyrène, the eternal plays upon words were true, reasonable and deep, born of her fatidical name.

On thinking about them he easily understood the motives of the return to old Cyran; they were simple, human, sociable, and without doubt cordial and even affectionate. . . .

"But really," mused Diomedes, "what does it all matter to me? I have thought too little of my own affairs these last few weeks. . . ."

And yet he could not deny the evidence of his duties towards Cyran. But what duties? Protect him? Rescue him? How? In opening or in closing the windows?

Wearied by these controversies, he wrote to Néo requesting a meeting, an hour

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spent near a window, or under the trees in her park.

To go there?

“Yes, she expects me. But what nuisances to contend with! See the old jockey, have to greet the old lady who anxiously detains you near her sofa by the questions she has long been stirring up in her uncultured, Oriental brain. She hates Néo, imposed on her in the guise of an orphan niece. The truth, which she knows, and which she dares not murmur, animates her crafty black eyes when the young girl passes, or when her name is mentioned. If she were not paralysed, Néo long since would have drunk poison. . . .”

In the afternoon Diomedes, having posted his letter, strolled, in spite of it, towards the Sina mansion.

The old jockey had gone out with Néo. He was obliged to endure the old Levantine “at home.”

On approaching the shaded corner where she was buried under cushions, a noise of medals and beads was heard. She prayed

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the whole day with ardent pleadings, aimlessly, thoughtlessly. Yet Diomedes had heard her confess: “I am strong, the Saints are with me, the Mother of God protects me!”

Keeping her rosary in her thin hands, her fingers lingering upon the bead whose orison she was finishing, she extended to Diomedes a vast gesture of welcome, then she spoke:

— They have sent me an idea, for they love me and wish me cured: “Rise and go to Jerusalem!” Then I ask: How does one go to Jerusalem? But here, no one knows how to answer when it is I who ask. Diomedes, you will tell me how to go to Jerusalem; I am listening.

Diomedes explained the facilities, the fatigues of the journey. He remembered the name of a steamer, of the railway to Jaffa, of an annual pilgrimage whose torpidity would suit the invalid. . . .

She shrieked, waving her rosary:

“May the Mother of God be blessed! I will go to Jerusalem!”

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Néobelle came in, and led Diomedes away whilst the old woman still shouted in menacing tones:

— I will go to Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CHESTNUT TREES

*The grass is soft and deep around the  
chestnut trees*

SHE led Diomedes under the trees. The stately park, solitary and light, welcomed them in its smile. The green trees stretched out their young shoots like fresh hands; the metallic laurels shone like sheaves of lances round purple beeches, solemn and proud, and the assembly of heavy chestnut trees lifted towards heaven, the flame of its sconces seeming like some immense repository, to shield the blessed sacrament of nature.

She led Diomedes under the chestnuts.

Robed in sombre red stuff, the obscure reflection giving a hard copperish glitter to her golden hair, partly covered with the black lace that had veiled the richness of

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her shoulders — Cyrène's scarf — Néo advanced, serious, her eyes sparkling, almost sacerdotal, full of life, of strength, of beauty. They had not yet spoken; she stopped, laid her two cool hands on Diomedes' cheeks and kissed him on the brow.

Then Diomedes kissed her hands and kept one within his.

They walked on, without words, troubled, awaiting one from the other the invitation of a new gesture.

Sown with small pink leaves, the gravel creaked softly under their feet; the air, imprisoned by the trees with their drooping branches, was balmy and fragrant; far away the waves of a forgotten ocean; near them, a silence filled with the hum of bees.

They sat on a bench, henceforth less nervous, able to look at each other, read in one another's eyes. Their lips trembled with desire, but Néo shook her head, threw herself back like a horse refusing the curb. To resist more easily she spoke:

— But I do not belong to you! No, no, I have given nothing, nothing of that which



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gives. . . . I do not know, I dream. . . .  
It is difficult to give oneself, really, entirely. . . .

— Not entirely yet, Néo. To give oneself little by little, day by day, joy by joy, as the flowering clusters of the chestnut trees give their small pink leaves one by one, to the breeze. . . .

— And see what they become, stains on the gravel, and we walk on them. To give oneself is to die. . . . Leaf by leaf, it is to die slowly. . . . Dio, I am neither chaste nor craven, I desire all I anticipate, and I know that beyond my desire and my anticipation there is a whole garden of flowers and delights; I only question myself as to whether I love you. . . . Yes, I do love you, friend, and yet, if I were only to love your intelligence, your eyes, your brow, your words — and not your lips?

Diomedes entered willingly into this sentimental controversy. He answered with ironical warmth:

— Taste of the fruit, Néo, and you will know.

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— Evil angel!

— The advice was good. What should we do with innocence? Ignorance, innocence—virtues childish and even somewhat animal. . . . Néó, your strong brave heart confesses scruples of a “child of Mary.” Taste all fruits and nourish yourself with the one you like.

— It is not the first time, Diomedes, that I have been given that advice. I have even given it to myself often, but without being able to follow it—even in thought. I am not the woman who goes amongst the field of men and who breaks off an awn and shells it, then another and still another, until the pathway leads her to another field, orchard, vineyard, or garden. No, my friend, I wish for a beautiful glass, chiselled and gilt, in which to drink a drop of pure wine, poured from a single flagon. I do not need a dinner service or a complete vineyard. . . .

— But then, what did I advise you? resumed Diomedes. To taste all fruits until you find the one that tempts your

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palate. . . . I was thinking of myself, and that afterwards you would go no further.

— No, that is your present thought. I prefer to believe you immoral than foppish.

— I am not a very beautiful glass, answered Diomedes, smiling. I am neither gilt nor chiselled, but one can become intoxicated with the wine I contain.

Thinking she had humiliated him, for his voice was somewhat embittered, Néo gave him her hands. Then, playing with her rings, Diomedes continued:

— I have the right to offer myself to you, Néo, having read your letter.

She endeavoured to take back her hands:

— Do not avail yourself of my weaknesses, of the dreams of a day of ennui.

Diomedes released her hands.

— Néo, you are a woman like every other woman.

— And perhaps rather more obscure, am I not?

— Neither more nor less.

— Ah! we were such friends when I did

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not know you were a man. . . . Let us still be friends. I will listen to you, looking into your eyes, and you will forget the perfume of my flesh. Since you have read my letter, remember all the pages and all the lines. I did offer myself but divided. Leave me half of myself.

— But that is impossible. To give but a part of oneself is to give all or nothing following the intention or the will. We are indivisible beings. Your soul is in your bosom, in your hips, in your knees, and as complete as in your brain; it is in your hands, your limbs and on your lips; it is everywhere—in your hair and in your finger nails, at the tips of your toes and at the bud of your breasts; it is in your smile, in your iris, in your teeth, on the tip of your tongue, in your gestures and in your fragrance. In kissing your shoulders I tasted your soul. . . . You wish to love only my words, you will love but a breath and a sound. My real words of life and love lie closed within the obscurity of my flesh; your caresses shall call them to the

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surface and you shall imbibe them easily like the sap which flows through the bark of the ash trees. . . .

— Be silent, Diomedes. It is you now, whom I fear. You represent as being mysterious and terrible, pleasures in which I saw but the voluptuousness of an abandon and of an obscure communion. . . . No! No! I fear you. Go! It seems to me as if all my flesh were going to sing like a harp and that you will hear, your ear against my heart, all the accumulated secrets of my life and of my dreams! No!

— I will not listen, Néo, resumed Diomedes gently. I will understand only what you wish me to understand, and I will capture only the most elementary secrets and outpourings with my hands and with my lips. I will ask of you but joy and cordiality, and to read on your lips the admission of desire. . . .

— Diomedes, you look cruel, despite the langour of your words. I do not recognise you. You are ugly. Your eyes pierce me. Your mouth would bite. . . .

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— It is because I love you, answered Diomedes, again becoming ironical. If you loved me also, you would think me handsome.

Remote, one from the other, they were silent, looking far away, beyond the grasses and the vari-coloured flowers.

The silence which calmed Diomedes and gave him back the mastery of all his egoism seemed to affect Néobelle. Her hands trembled somewhat on her knees, her bosom heaved slowly, she wept.

— I do not know what I wish! I do not know what I wish!

She clung to Diomedes and embraced him violently.

Diomedes kissed her eyes slowly, musing:

“The thick moss lies abundant beneath the oaks, the grass is soft and deep around the chestnut trees. The garden is deserted; no window glances at us. To be happy! Irrecoverable pleasure, joys enduring unto death! Ah! I will have time to listen when she is heedless, and time to fill my lips with that

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taste of love whose freshness has the insipidity of water in porous pitchers. . . . She weeps, she weeps for her innocence, and she is choked by desire as she would be by an apple. I have her and I play. The game does not amuse me. How she has changed since the day I feared to be the ball of thread grasped in the young violent claws! I pity her. She is tragical and wretched. Virginity is tragic, as the day that dawns or the day that dies, as the hour that strikes. Not more so. It is nothing. The hand passes over the figures with the same movement as it does the emptiness separating them; it only quivers at the start and at the finish. Must I cling to this chain? Descend slowly in the obscure pit of the mine, and reascend perhaps, amidst a constellation of diamonds, or die below ground with the anguish of having chosen the wrong travelling companion? Oh! God, how wanting I am in ingenuity! She prevails over me since she weeps. I will do whatever her tears desire. . . .”

She held him more closely.

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Diomedes ceased thinking.

She raised her head and offered her lips.

They had not moved, no ugly gesture had disturbed their harmonious embrace or deformed the grace of their attitude. Only their eyes had grown pale, their cheeks had blushed and their smile, doubtful and unsatisfied, avowed the anxiety for equivocal delights.

Diomedes was thinking less and less.

He said in a childish voice,

— Again!

— No.

Néo had answered almost harshly; and yet she was moved; and her restless eyes seemed to fix some conjured up image.

Diomedes felt that to insist he would be obliged to use sentimental phrases; a complete romantic vocabulary was stirring in his half-conscious mind. He felt inclined to say: “Give me your lips, my love. . . . How your heart beats! . . . Your eyes are star sapphires. . . . Say you love me. . . . Say it again, for ever! . . . Oh! to love in the country, in the midst of nature!



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. . . You sigh, my dearest? . . . I would wish to carry you to the end of the world! . . . I warn you, I am jealous. . . . She is mine, mine only. . . . How lovely you are! . . . What are you thinking of? . . . Look at me. . . . You know, I read in your eyes. It seems to me I could not have lived without you. . . .” But little by little, these small nothings which his memory recalled, amused him. He sought for others, incapable of any commentary on his present adventure

Meanwhile Néobelle was reflecting. She said:

— Diomedes, I will come to you this evening. I know what I desire and I know what awaits me. I will come. No social prejudice interests me and I feel as free of my acts as if I were alone in the world. Will you accept me?

Diomedes answered firmly:

— Yes.

Then:

— These are nuptials? We pledge our oath?

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— No, no oaths. Your counsels tempt me: to taste of the fruit. . . . Then. . . .

— The first come, said Diomedes, rather surprised at these cruel expression.

— Are you then the first comer? Don't let us talk any more, Dio, ah! how much better we might have loved, had we spoken less. Don't let us speak any more of ourselves. . . .

She rose, suddenly turned pale. Her resolution gave her a tragic look.

They returned, walking side by side, in silence.

At this hour, the garden was sunless but still warm and luminous; the flowers seemed pensive, the trees solemn. Diomedes felt in communion with this unconscious and somewhat heavy gravity. . . . Néobelle stopped and said:

— You will dine here and take me to a theatre. The farthest. . . .

— The Odéon?

— Very well.

They brushed past a thicket of small red roses; Néo's dress caught in the thorns.

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The bush of roses was shaken as by a storm and all the little red roses shed their leaves on the gravel in a rain of blood.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE DREAM

*I regret the dream I had dreamed  
of love*

THEY set out on foot, by the broad deserted avenues.

—I am pleased with myself, said Néobelle. I am acting as a free woman. I do not yet know whether I love you, Dio, but I am grateful to you for having assisted my will. . . . To think that my companions, all those pallid young girls, with submissive hearts and saddened flesh, await a husband with the docility of bronzes or pewters set in a showcase! Ah! Ah!

Intoxicated at having broken the rule, she spoke in an exalted tone:

— My joys, my life, my body, my soul are at stake. I wish to follow my desires, and not the order established by egoism.

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It is necessary I should learn to know the playings of all my faculties, of all my being. Thus, I shall realise what is my vocation and for which acts I was created and born.

Diomedes was grave. He felt himself become the high-priest of initiations. His irony forsook him. He experienced religious sentiments.

During dinner, the brief sentences exchanged with M. de Sina (a man of courteous and stupid bearing, confiding as soon as he had left the subject of business), in the centre of this home of which he was violating the heart, Diomedes had experienced some mundane scruples, also the boredom of tying himself down, of being doubtless obliged to enter thoroughly into a milieu of which the appearances alone pleased him. Now, forgetting his uneasiness, he thought but of his mission and his attitude of sacrificer. The simplicity of the rites pleased him. Nothing social, no intrusion of laws, or of accidental authorities, no human etiquette came to trouble the

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serenity of action and spoil all that was divine in the spontaneous harmony of two wills and two joys. . . .

He did not finish this mental harangue. Obligated to smile, he confessed that the pathetic circumstances hardly favored the liberty of his judgment. His conclusion was:

“Until the end, in the spirit and with the gestures that suit.”

The distance was great; they took a carriage.

Close to each other, in an attitude of chaste tenderness, they dreamed obscurely; meanwhile Diomedes thought:

“Nuptials or a ‘bonne fortune’?”

Several times his lips formulated this unpleasant interrogation.

It seemed like nuptials, because of the gravity of the silence, the anxious care of the eyes, the reserve and shyness of the hands; but the cab told the haste of their desires, the fear of shortening the too short hours, the care taken in hiding, more from shame than modesty; the race to

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voluptuousness rather than the slow wandering towards love.

A keen light passed, like the ray of a beacon, over Néo's face. She was pale and beautiful and now shivering from all the confused little thoughts which disturbed her heart. As he was looking at her, she smiled, saying slowly:

— Dio! Dio!

They arrived as from a journey.

— It seems as if I had come from far, from so far!

On opening his door Diomedes had the same sensation. He hardly recognised his home. Everything had changed. The usual flowers in his library had the new and fresh aspect of an unexpected ornament. Néo went to inhale them, believing in a prophecy. She walked about the three rooms, then locked herself in the bedroom.

When she reappeared, Diomedes adored her, simply, silent and without any gesture of ownership. Moved, he followed her without haste, and found her lying on the

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open bed, in the fair and proud attitude of a Danae.

Diomedes questioned her eyes. They were serious, but the lips smiled and murmured:

— Dio, I love you for the love I give you.

— And you, are you not happy, Néo?

Without answering, she clasped Diomedes.

But in her inattentive flesh the tumult just awakened was silent. Then she refused his kisses.

— I regret the dream I had dreamed of love.

She looked at Diomedes, without curiosity, without temptation, then said, but softly, for her heart was kind:

— Go!

The carriage was waiting. Eleven o'clock struck. At the Odéon, they read the posters, got into an omnibus, and at the end of ten minutes took another cab. Néo had hidden her face under a lace scarf:



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— It is the same one. I will return it to Cyrène.

— Give it to me? asked Diomedes.

— If you wish, my friend.

Then:

— Recall to me the play, the title.

— “Un soir.”

— An evening, an evening, an evening.

. . . I shall never remember. . . . It is nothing, it means nothing. “Un soir. . . .”

— You are cruel, Néo. Think of all that is contained for us in these simple and soft words: An evening. . . .

— Ah! You are thinking of our adventure? An evening, it is true, an evening. . . . I shall remember.

She wished to laugh, but sobbed.

Faltering, she repeated:

— An evening, an evening. . . .

Suddenly raising her head, her whole figure straightened, she regained possession of her pride:

— I am happy. I have accomplished my will. I know myself better. Néo truly is the marble I thought her to be. . . .

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—I will give it life, said Diomedes. I will blow on the coals until the flame bursts forth as a joyfulness. . . .

She resumed simply:

—Néo truly is the marble I thought her to be and I am glad. Yes, I was rather disappointed. . . . I had dreamed . . . I had seen conflagrations. . . . But if I wept, then or now, it is from sheer nervousness. I had already told you that I had no sensual feeling. I am therefore neither surprised nor humiliated, nor afraid, and I do not think I have paid too dearly for a notion, as you say, so precious and which will be useful to direct me in life. I know what I can give a lover and I know what he can give me. I can give him everything; he cannot give me anything but the pleasure of seeing his happiness. Therefore, sure of myself, I shall easily dominate the feelings which my useless beauty excites. I have been disturbed. I will not be so again.

—Néo, remember that I love you!

—But I belong to you, my dear, it is agreed. I am your mistress.

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They had arrived. She stepped out rapidly, gave the coachman Diomedes' address and closed the door crying out:

— Adieu!

Diomedes felt dejected. He felt criminal. He felt stupid. The heavy and peremptory noise of the front door closed (as he thought) in anger, seemed to shake his body with its commotion. The carriage rolled on. He accused himself. He despised himself. Such an act and nothing! An evening! It was of old, it was far away, where? On which ocean, in which desert? The sands rose like waves, an ardent foam burnt him through and through; lying flat, his head buried, he awaited the end of the storm, the peace of the heavens; but all sensation was swamped; he was sinking without knowing whether he had just been engulfed under an ocean of sands or in the depths of the vast unfathomable sea.

With a sorrowful heart, he lay on the bed where she had lain.

He slept.

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In the morning his first thought was imperious:

“Neo. To write to her.”

He experienced a feeling of freshness and vigour, as after a 'conquered fever. Convalescent and sentimental, he accepted the gentle dreams, the pure ideas that came into his blissful imagination.

“To write to her, to see her. To kiss her hands. To console her. To love her. To give her hope and faith in serenity. . . .”

He dreamed his letter and at last wrote nothing:

“I will go this afternoon. She expects me myself. We will go under the chest-net trees. . . .

An evening. . . . Now the adventure seemed to him quite natural, quite simple, quite human. Thousands of similar affairs were in the history of every night, without emotions, hardly liturgical, earthly comedies, songs, jests, blushes, smiles.

“Ours was a tragedy of the alcove; those are the most beautiful tragedies but the

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least easy to comprehend for simple hearts and naive flesh.

“Every maiden is ready to give herself immediately, with good-will and some grace, according to the customs, in a conjugal gesture, at the command of the code and the anthems. . . . But we! . . . Nothing more than perhaps the choice and the courage of a falsehood. . . . I must see her. I will go at three o’clock. Her words afterward in the carriage? . . . But she was ill. At that moment she should have been asleep, her head on my shoulder. The usual picture! .

At last he was finding his way athwart perturbed nature. The usual scenery was becoming outlined: here the river with its boats in which the boatmen sleep, the current carries them towards the dense forest where all is engulfed under the vast dark trees: a few men look on, smiling, standing on the riverbank, and if they fall, they go alone, swept over the stones, towards the abyss. . . .

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“Whatever happens, one finds oneself alone always.”

An adventure. Was it then only an adventure, pathetic but sad. He repeated his motto to himself: “Until the end.”

Then:

“Until the end, but in words. I can only invent words. I am dominated by action. Life makes of me what it wills. . . . One must obey life.”

A telegram:

“Ten o’clock.

“For the probable hour of your awakening, Dio. First of all, consider that I dream of you. Until I have written you the contrary at least two or three times, I am yours. Forget that I was unkind. All was permissible to me. I shall give you pain but from afar. My father is taking me to Flowerbury where he is fond of a stable (a very fine one with pointed arches). I also. And there I shall reflect and suffer perhaps. . . . At last you belong to me. I feel rich. Do not write to me. Farewell.

“BELLE.”

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“‘And there I shall reflect. . . .’ Good.  
‘. . . and suffer perhaps. . . .’ How  
gentle she is today!”

He read over again:

“‘At last you belong to me. . . .’  
Yes, I am conquered, I have knelt down.  
. . . Horse of Diomedes, may thy bites  
not be poisoned! The old team is broken  
up. One horse has snapped its halter.  
Another. . . . Which other? I have even  
forgotten its name. Another. . . . Of  
that one, I shall not dream, I shall no more  
stroke its quiet shoulder or its fine mane.  
. . . My dreams have lost their virtue.

“‘At last you belong to me. . . .’  
I belong. It is true. I am tied to the  
creature I subjected. In yielding to me,  
she broke my liberty. The horse rears and  
falls back on its rider or else, throwing its  
head back, bites the legs that beat against  
its flanks.

“I belong. . . . Sometimes man re-  
volts. . . . Enough. To rest, to reflect,  
I also, and to suffer — unless I forget.  
No, I cannot forget. I belong.”

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He wished to divert himself. How?

His circle was broken. He regretted the amiable, tractable women who respected his liberty, his mind, his conscience, with whom he diverted himself agreeably. Adventures of the flesh or of dreams, lightsome adventures of the heart.

But he was ashamed of his regret.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE FAN

*It is a magical fan. . . . This little thing changes into a woman at the prayer of a man of good-will, that is all*

HE went to see Pascase.

In his hovel, organised according to the laws of science and hygiene, spacious, light, cold, without carpets or curtains or hangings, or any draperies, with brackets made of glass shelves, with whitewashed furniture, Pascase, clad in a long hospital coat, was perusing medical books. He allowed Diomedes to come in, as always, but said:

— You are the only one.

— I know it. The only man — but women?

— No. Their skirts are full of germs gathered in the streets, on the stair-cases. . . .

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— And Mauve?

— Did not come.

— Yet. . . . What are you seeking?

— The name of an illness.

— Yours?

— Yes, answered Pascase, somewhat impatiently.

Diomedes let him turn over the pages, filled with pity for this simple, honest and credulous man.

“He is really a good specimen of scientific credulity, which differs from the others only in its object. Two centuries ago, he would have defended the Bible against Bayle. Today he defends Science — still against Bayle, against irony, against incredulity. He is of the race of believers, the eternal race, and perhaps the real reserve of the world. The honest and simple man believes; it is his function. He believes the truth taught by the authorities of his time; turn by turn, and sometimes simultaneously, he believes the word of M. de Condorcet and that of M. de Maistre. Avid, his faith forestalls the future; it

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forestalls miracles, it asserts itself in all the possibilities which comply with the permitted principles. It was theology; it was philosophy; it is science. Man is born kneeling; he must adore. When it is not a monstrosity, it is a tubulated retort; when it is not the Infinite, it is an ovule. . . .

“Pascase has several beliefs. The case is frequent. One leads to the other and all agree. Pascase unites in his pious soul hygiene and Christianity.

“But even he is not, neither he nor his brothers of today, the true Believer, the one who holds the Infinite in one bead of his rosary, or who kindles, at the flame of a wax taper, the heavenly fire. Pascase is not the humble and admirable poet who transforms the small plaster or wooden statuette into a god and who beseeches the stone to be more human than himself, a man. . . . Pascase is the reasoning believer. . . .”

— I have found it! shouted Pascase.

— What?

— The name.

— Ah!

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— It is not dangerous.

— You are sure?

Diomedes looked at the date of the book.

— Bad. . . . Three years old. . . .  
Science advances. . . . A new edition has  
come out.

— When?

— This week.

— You think so?

— One must know everything, answered  
Diomedes, to be able to deny everything.  
All sciences contradict each other and all  
beliefs accumulate. Ah! all! all sensations;  
all notions; all dreams! All, and to crush  
all into dust and to disperse it to the winds!  
To become a new little being who drinks in  
life with naivete!

— You are far from realising such a  
condition, Diomedes.

— I follow my own road. I know what  
would be my realisation.

— What?

— Total ignorance, total indifference,  
total indulgence. . . .

— Well, then, resumed Pascase, smiling,

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be somewhat indulgent. I am going to be married.

— That is very social.

— You despise me?

— Scarcely. Endure life. I also, I endure life. Whom are you to marry?

— Christine.

— Ah!

— Yes. Since I know, through Tanche and others, that you love Mademoiselle Néobelle de Sina, I had no scruples whatever. Besides, you boasted. Christine never did come to you. She swore so to me. She only knows you by name, by sight, and by a smile, perhaps. . . .

— Unutterable confusion, admirable dream! Remember then the fragrance of roses.

— Nerves.

— And it is the same one? My Christine, my own?

— Yes, that one of whom you spoke as being an ideal love, the one who haunted your ennui — but who never crossed your threshold.

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— Embodied dream! She is blonde, she is slight, she is smiling and silent?

— She is all that.

— She exists?

— Pascase, you rob me of my dreams! You rifle my brain! Or else, have you the power to evoke in flesh the creations of my mind? Christine, the fragrance of roses, the fan. . . . You realise my thoughts, you give a human form to the flowing imaginings of my nerves. . . .

— No, answered Pascase, and yet the story is wonderful. This young girl, who is really called Christine, lives with her mother, near you, in the neighboring house. For a living, she decorates fans, principally with the roses amongst which she lives, surrounded by their fragrance. You have seen her often, in the street, but with an indifferent gaze; obscurely she fascinated you, her image penetrated you, and in hours of unguarded solitude your subconscious imagination evoked her, human and living, under your gaze, under your hands, under your lips. Having entered your brain,

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your eyes and all your senses having drunk in her beauty with her figure, her colour, her fragrance and the fan she always carries, thus she came forth at your secret command, when you had the intense desire for a companion in your solitude; — and thus, without seeing her, without touching her, I felt her diffused in the atmosphere of your room, like a breath of roses, and your fan, her own work (I know it) supplied our dreams with the real matter of life. . . . Christine, I loved her as you did, from chance meetings, and when you had evoked her, I rushed in, jealous, almost mad. . . .

Diomedes admired the force of this argument, adding:

— It is possible. All is possible. All is true. I played with a young woman whom I called Christine. She was pretty, simple, lovable and — mute! I never heard her voice, or the slightest cry or sighing. It did not surprise me. . . . She came out of a book, always the same book, and the same page, where there was a folded picture representing hermits' little huts in the midst of a

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forest of great sombre firs. . . . An hallucination, without doubt, but I have long renounced classifying my sensations in two kinds, the real and the unreal. I accept all the pictures which are conjured up, in me or before me; none troubles me, none frightens me. . . . Christine symbolised many of my desires. . . . All that has become obscure to me. . . . I am devoured by the life of the flesh, by the life that cries and weeps. . . . I have not seen her since long before the scene of the fan. And yet, I still have the fan.

— No, said Pascase, for here it is. I stole it from you. Christine, yesterday, owned it to be her work. . . .

Diomedes resumed:

— It is a magic fan. . . . What other word? Eh! Cinderella's mice. . . . My friend, this little thing changes into a woman at the prayer of a man of good-will, that is all.

Diomedes took the fan. He opened it, looked at it, closed it, inhaled its fragrance nervously. Remembering the scene in which Pascase had seemed to him mad, he



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was conscious of assuming, at this hour, in this absurd apartment, a similar attitude, still more humiliating. . . .

Christine was coming. . . .

She entered without a sound, smiling. She looked at Diomedes for a second, then, without showing any sentiment, she extended her long pale hands to Pascale. At once she busied herself in measuring the walls, arranging stuffs brought in a package; she drove nails, standing on a chair, always mute. Pascale looked on, fearful but happy.

Diomedes was afraid.

It was Christine. It was really the aristocratic maiden accustomed, despite reduced circumstances, to realise rapidly her wishes. She clothed the bareness of the walls, insupportable to her sensitive eyes; she drove nails into the plaster, with, perhaps, a secret enjoyment in lifting her hand and striking. . . .

Her narrow black dress, her heavy auburn hair, all her supple, gentle and harmonious body and that look of an apparition. . . . He recalled every pleasure of his dreaming hours. . . .

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She spoke. Her voice was clear, incisive and alert:

—Take away that table. Then, you must go and bring me some nails.

Pascase obeyed.

When he had gone, without descending, without putting down her hammer, she turned and bent her head slightly towards Diomedes, who said very softly:

—Will you allow me to kiss your hand?

—Oh! I have already heard that voice saying those same words. . . . One summer day as I slept, enervated by the fragrance of the roses. . . . It was in an obscure and warm room. . . . No, no. . . . I do not wish to remember. . . . Go away, go away!

But Diomedes had taken her hand, which slowly and as with fright approached his lips.

He kissed it, breathed in its fragrance.

It was Christine's flesh.

Pascase was returning. He went out.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LAUREL BUSH

*If I had met Apollo, I should not have  
changed into a fig-tree.*

*Into a laurel bush?*

*What does it matter? . . .*

POSSESSION at a distance. But are there distances? Our nerves are antennæ, prolonged into the infinite. . . . Hermits, men confined in the hollow of a tree, watch, as in a mirror, the movements of human life. . . . Will is almighty, will, that is to say desire, or perhaps dream. . . . For we cannot direct our antennæ beyond the immediate; further off, their movements escape us, they agitate at random. . . . All is mystery, all is miracle. . . . The senses have a boundless power. It is no more surprising to be able to see through a wall than through a window pane.

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Besides, there are no material laws; there are all possibilities; there is an infinity of manifestations and combinations. . . . Christine came; there was no repulsion, she yielded to me the grace of her silent kisses. She, the same one whom I saw driving nails into a wall? The same one, or the same nothingness? She had fallen asleep amongst roses; she came and gave herself to me although keeping the integrity of her flesh and the candour of her chasteness. Absurd and so true! Insane, and so reasonable, so consistent with all the histories of past times, when the sensitive genius of man had not yet been choked by analysis and reasoning! But he revolts, he waves aside the claws of the demons, he must live everything in life; he bursts asunder and disowns the naive little prison in which he had been bound with puerile chains. . . .”

Diomedes mused on the one work he wished to write after long years of adventures. He sought for a title:

“Philosophy of the possible. Yes. . . .”

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Just then he felt confusedly that his arm had been taken and that some one was walking by his side. The picture was entering slowly through the corner of his eye. It was confused. He turned his head.

It was Mauve!

Mauve began to laugh, but discreetly. She seemed calmed, sagacious, subdued. She was dressed almost seriously, with less frivolity and less servitude: a morning costume of subdued elegance.

She was willing to lunch with Diomedes.

— I was going to see Tanche, but without having promised to do so. He expects me always. He knows how to wait, without being jealous or restless. Tanche knows life. I am very fond of him.

She dared not say more. The good news was too difficult to tell. The necessary words seemed to her somewhat big and as if beyond the purpose. So then, she prattled.

The restaurant gave her the assurance that their drawing-rooms give to other women. Seated on the red plush, she regulated her demeanour with facility, erect,

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slow to take off her gloves, to twist her wrists; attentive to her rings, to her movements in the distant mirror.

After some chat, she inquired about Pas-case:

— He is very handsome, that friend of Diomedes, he seems strong and cordial. Pas-case shall be my only regret. All those I desired, I held, I drew imperiously to me.

She laughed and, less intoxicated by wine than by her laughter and her memories:

— All! And some were difficult to captivate. I was sentimental clad in a sombre robe, seductive in a light dress; I made my complexion look pale or fair, my eyes blue or dark. . . . And whilst marchionesses charm jockeys or valets, musicians or fools, Mauve was the beloved of Parnassus. . . .

— And of the Gymnasium, added Diomedes.

— Some are handsome, answered Mauve, and others eloquent. They compensate one another. If I had met Apollo, I should not have changed into a fig-tree. . . .

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— Into a laurel bush? . . .

— What does it matter? I should not have changed into a laurel bush. I would rather have wished myself twice a woman. . . . Circumfusa. All around. . . . Pellegrin explained it to me. . . . His joy expressed itself in the recitation of Latin verses, and he translated them to me. . . . It was intoxicating.

— Less so than listening to you, little Mauve. Exquisite confessions!

— I am not confessing, I am speaking at random, I think aloud, I live my past again, for I shall henceforth live but little. . . . Listen, Diomedes. I who had but precise desires, but carnal emotions; I who thought myself capable but of friendship or companionship; — well, I am in love, deplorably in love. . . .

— With Cyran?

— With Tanche!

— Ah!

— Yes, Cyran moved me at first, but one feels him to be so indifferent! Tanche has said the same things to me as Cyran,

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but with such warmth! Ah, things, things! . . . At last he has conquered me — and I love him.

— Mauve, it seems to me as if flowers have died. There is a scent of dead leaves in the garden.

— It is finished. I have given myself. In a few days, I shall go and live with him. Cyran allows it. Later on we can marry.

— Very good, said Diomedes. Rather sad, but very good.

— This is the raillery I feared, resumed Mauve, now quite serious. Are you railing at me, Diomedes, or at Tanche?

— At myself, answered Diomedes. The acts of others are a mirror in which one sees one's own future. . . . And then, Mauve, even if I did smile a little, would you be really angry?

— Not really. Mauve's wedding. . . . Mauve's wedding. . . . Besides, it is only a prospect. Tanche is already married. But if I married him tomorrow, in two years I should be a fine lady, like the others, my dear, and as much thought of, with a



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court, a day at home, festoons, orchids and sighs, teas, parties, suppers, débutante balls. . . . Yes, Mauve will give débutante balls, when her daughters are fifteen and the wives of her lovers of yesterday shall come with their children.

Diomedes was careful not to insist. One could not bear too heavily on Mauve, the little sweet-meat seller would reappear, spring up like a jack-in-the-box. Five or six years of literature and bad morals had given her an agreeable veneer, but this veneer was liable to crack. He felt some pity for Tanche. Mauve was a pretty pastime, an amusing romance for a wet afternoon, but to read Mauve always — and reread her!

He pondered, alarmed to see how many of his thoughts and even his impulses had lately become modified. Was it a normal change or was he enduring Néo-belle's domination? for truly Mauve interested him no longer. . . . His flesh had detached itself from this passing flesh notwithstanding its freshness and comeliness!

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He thought of Fanette, wished to see her, assured of a last disillusion. . . . And, as Néo inspired him with none save calm, almost religious desires, despoiled of all sense allure pursuits, of all that is the luxury and spice of voluptuousness, he saw himself suddenly in the state of an overfed, torpid animal that licks its chops before going to sleep.

Such baseness horrified him. He wished to vanquish the sentimental herd.

“Mauve and I now, it would be a little secret infidelity.”

But that pimento seemed weak and even rancid to him.

“How dead they are, all these old pleasures, and how dead they are, all these old sufferings! Marriage! all that was social in that word formerly solemn or jocund! And all the cunning, or all the theatrical exclamations about a contract or an oath! Now one has to attain the secret and human fact at the bottom of all conventions and all duperies. . . . The act of giving, pure and simple, is more majestic than a pompous wedding with flowers and music.”

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He was thinking nervously, his head aching and full of contradictions; but he had not even the courage to retract his thoughts, as was his habit, so as to correct their paradoxical excess.

Mauve was bored. Diomedes had nothing to say. However, at last conquering his painful surexcitation, he murmured sad but almost gentle words:

— So, Mauve, we shall see each other no more?

— Oh, yes!

— No more with the same eyes. The eyes change colour when they change their desires. You know it, Mauve?

— I shall always love Diomedes.

— No. And already the other day, when you came to me — from habit or friendship — you were no more the same sparkling spring, and I tasted but saddened and tepid waters.

— Oh!

— You had no desire. You did not wish to be the stream coursing under the salted water-cress, amongst the flowering-mint.

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The water stagnated in the shadow of pine trees that harden and rust it. . . .

— I do not know. . . . Am I not always the same?

She almost screamed, striking her breast kneaded in wholesome firm dough.

— It is Mauve!

Then she laughed:

— I shall find myself anew. Who knows? The spring will burst forth again. It sleeps. Perhaps it is not dead.

They drank naively to the perpetuity of their natures, but Diomedes knew that one does not look twice over the same landscape; that one does not drink twice at the same fountain.

When Mauve had been escorted to Tanche's door, Diomedes experienced a dislike for solitude. Néo seemed far away and almost diffused in the nimbus of the past.

“Yesterday! But there was so little of my will in that adventure! And I am so incapable of governing the sequel according to my liking or even of choosing an ending for it! Why did Néo leave? To flee from

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me? Absurd, since I obey her. Perhaps it is to make me thoroughly understand *that* — that I obey her, that she can withdraw scornfully without fearing me at the hour when the most hardened hearts suffer from solitude. Everything is solitude to me today, everything is darkness, and the little light made by Mauve was agreeable. . . ."

He roamed about the streets, aimlessly; before paintings, he dreamed of Cyran, of his frescoes, of Cyrène whom he was to lead there.

On returning home he found a note in an unknown, pale, awkward handwriting.

"Five o'clock.

"I would like to see Diomedes tonight.  
Very, very ill.

"FANETTE."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE JUGGLER

*Inimitable juggler, hair! . . . How  
artfully you cheat life!*

FANETTE was dying, submerged by love, in her great luxurious bed. Her feverish face with its crimson burning cheek-bones, its parched lips and sparkling eyes, showed the interior fire, the flame, devourer of life. She had bared her somewhat sunken bosom and her hands played slowly with pages torn from the tender book.

Diomedes knelt down, kissed the burning breast. A muffled but still gentle voice thanked him:

— Your lips are cool. Again! O Diomedes, it is you, you are here. I knew you would come, you. The others have forsaken me, all, all! But you, you could not

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forsake me because you are Diomedes.  
. . . O you . . . O thou! . . . To  
think I am going to die in your arms! I am  
very happy. . . . You and the book!

And she drew to her lips, kissing them  
with an equal love, Diomedes' hand and  
the pages torn from the tender book.

— But you are pretty, little Nette, you  
smile, your eyes shine. . . . Give your  
arm. . . . Fever . . . much fever. . . .  
To lie covered up, with one's arms under  
the bedclothes, to think of nothing, to  
sleep. . . .

— Sleep. . . . It is so long since I  
have slept! But I await the immense sleep.  
. . . Oh, how comfortable I shall be!  
Already I feel well. . . . You are there!  
Yes, he is there! Listen, they came this  
afternoon, the great ghosts with eyes of fire  
beneath their shrouds. . . . They wished to  
take me away, but I besought them. . . .  
I wanted to see you. . . . They will come  
back. Do not be afraid, Diomedes, they  
are not cruel. They are angels come to take  
souls and lead them towards the joy, out

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there. . . . Ah! how I suffer! My heart is burning like a red hot coal, it writhes, it screams, it bursts, it is ablaze! Put your hand to quench the flames. . . . Your hand is cool. . . . Oh, how I love you!

Diomedes let his hand stay long on the wasted bosom, though its burning was really that of a furnace; then, as Fanette had closed her eyes, soothed by the magnetism of his touch, he withdrew, to ask some questions of the servant who was weeping in her kitchen.

Then he understood that in presence of grief and of death everything fades away, intelligence, social and moral differences, castes, virtue,—all those chance clothes with which man covers his instinct.

This old woman who had never waited on Fanette except with reluctance, shocked in her pauper's morality by all the refinements of a sensual life, this homely slattern wept sincerely and her simple words protested:

—So pretty, so young and so good, Monsieur Diomedes! It is not just! You



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will tell me that she followed her fancies and that she is punished for her sins! Oh, Monsieur Diomedes, death all the same is a very great punishment! I know that she went about always quite naked, even here, before me, and I trembled with shame. . . . That offends the good God, that does. . . . No one has ever seen me quite naked, Monsieur Diomedes. But each one has his own ideas. . . . However, I forgive all willingly. . . . The doctor has said it was the end. He said also: Ah! how many poor girls I have seen die just that way! He will come back at midnight. Here are the medicines. One is missing. I am going to get it. When she suffocates, we must make her drink some. Then she will die quietly, peacefully, like a child dropping to sleep. That is what he says.

Diomedes went back into the room with the phials.

All these manœuvres seemed to him ugly. He would have wished so close to death less medicine and more dignity—flowers, distant music, pale tapers. The idea of giving

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opium to a moribund however, met with his approval. [He felt that he liked that doctor then, thinking of his own fortune, he considered himself happy at not having to fear the hospital, that prison of the sick, that laboratory where all flesh is vile, where each body opens as a commonplace Bible before the curiosity of science.

Mournful parables read in the distended nerves and putrefying muscles! . . . So Fanette was going to die. . . . He felt horror, pity, but little sorrow.

“Poor child! Yet how privileged she is. She is going to die, but in full happiness. Her eyes will have as a last vision my serious face and the ray of a mute goodbye; her sinking hands will clutch at the hand of a friend; and, heavy from being filled with nothingness, her drooping head will rest on my brotherly shoulder. Ah! die in happiness, Fanette, since you must die, and give me, dear little girl, the example of a smile, at the hour when a smile is perfect beauty. . . .”

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Diomedes scarcely heard, faint and slow, Fanette's voice.

— You are there?

He laid his hand on her hot brow.

— He is there. . . I feel his hand on my brow. . . . His hand is cool. My forehead is bathed in fresh water. . . .

Now I am doing my hair. . . . My comb has fallen. . . . Never mind. . . . Give me my white robe and my long veil. . . . Yes, madame, it is my little communicant — she is so sweet — a little angel, Madame — ah! night has come — no, it is a cloud. . . . I don't know anything any more, I don't know. . . .

Diomedes, as soon as the voice had ceased, lost in the catching of her breath, turned slightly, for he thought he had heard foot-falls on the carpet. It was so, and the servant was saying:

— Monsieur Diomedes, I thought I was doing right. Returning from the chemist's, I met him. He is here.

Diomedes turned completely round. A priest was standing at the foot of the bed,

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his hat in his hand, like a visitor, rather indifferent, almost shy. That priest, met by chance. . . .

Diomedes hesitated, fearing the recitation of formulæ, a commonplace ministry, a harsh and perhaps raucous voice that would terrify the gentle sleeper. . . . But he mused:

“The liturgies must be accomplished.”

Then:

“He is perhaps called at Fanette’s desire.”

And he trembled at the thought that this desire might have been unfulfilled, despised himself for not having read better in the obscure soul of his little dying friend.

Meanwhile the priest, feeling that his presence was not objectionable, had knelt down. His head in both hands, he prayed.

Diomedes thought his attitude beautiful. His cloak swung back, his somewhat long hair gave him the appearance of a great black angel, of a mysterious messenger of compassion and mercy. He lifted his head, his eyes full of tears.

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Surprised, Diomedes asked in a whisper:

— You weep, sir! You know her, then?

— No, but every death touches my heart, answered the priest, looking at Diomedes with large, gentle, dimmed eyes. And this one seems to me so painfully pure. . . . I heard her delirious confession. . . . One does not die with that grace and that utter trust in God when one has had, even for a day, an ugly soul.

— She has sinned, resumed Diomedes, who thought he misunderstood. She was even by way of being, in the full measure of her nature, the sinner.

— I know it. The servant told me! What does it matter? The sin reveals itself in the consciousness of having sinned. In themselves, acts are but gestures: the soul is hardly responsible for the movements of the automaton. Those alone have done wrong who have wished wrong. She obeyed the rhythm of life, could she break it? Strength is not given to all. To live according to one's nature is to live according to God. . . .

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Fanette, her eyes suddenly wide open and fixed, moved with a start. Her hands, pushing away the coverlets, rose towards her rebellious bosom which she clutched. A breath filled with mists passed through her open mouth.

Raising the pale head, its cheeks branded with fire, Diomedes let a few drops of the liquor of peace trickle through the lips. Then Fanette seemed to revive, her eyes turned gently towards the eyes of Diomedes. The sight of the priest caused her no dread; she lifted towards him her weary hand which dropped at once, exhausted — and already the eyes were closing, the head sinking. . . .

The priest laid his lips on the waxen hand. He seemed to wish to be blessed and absolved by this soul whose wings were beating.

The mist-like breath hurried, muffled and almost harsh; the muscles of the neck trembled; the priest murmured, whilst Diomedes held in his hands the thin fingers that moved like grasses going with the stream:

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“Free thyself, poor soul, go towards mercy. Love holds out its arms to thee and Pity, its sister, kneels to smooth the path on which thy naked feet must tread.

“Free thyself, poor soul!

“Suffer no more, candid creature, go towards mercy. May the vast white wings of hope be the sails of thy craft, and may the good winds of heaven urge thee towards the shore!

“Free thyself, poor soul!

“Rejoice, heart full of grace and go towards mercy. Freed from sin, purified from untruths, enter into the choir of angels and become the viola which repeats in melodies the thought of the Infinite.

“Free thyself, dear soul and having once entered into glory, deign to pray for us, miserable sinners. Amen.”

At these last words, Fanette died, swept away by a great shudder.

The priest went out.

Diomedes remained alone; whilst the servant sobbed, he mused. This peaceful



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death had moved him without his feeling real sorrow.

“If I had heard of her death only in a few weeks, I would scarcely have been troubled. Therefore I did not love Fanette! And yet? No, I loved her less cordially than did this poor servant by whom she was secretly despised. I loved her body, her hair, her voice, all that was Fanette, but herself? No. She was to me one of the moments and one of the forms of the race and I never asked of her anything but that communion. It was myself alone I loved, echoed by the vibrations of her nerves. I, I alone, and always I. . . . Ah! yes that alone is possession; that alone is true. Ah! I find myself without seeking, today! Sad night during which I will understand that my nature excludes me from the banquet. And Néo? Do I love Néo? Yesterday. . . . It was yesterday, at the very hour of this agony. . . . How simple everything is, how everything is classed according to order, how everything succeeds to everything naively.



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What a succession of miracles resolved with a truly divine and candid elegance. Inimitable juggler, hail! Thy sure movements are so rapid that I fail to follow the thread of the skein they sketch on space. How artfully you cheat life! And in the empty goblet, filled only with a mouldiness of death, think with what grace you pour for the assistants the wine of eternal fecundations. I am but one of the black dots painted on your dice, and you make me spin around as you wish, divine juggler, inimitable juggler; but I have confidence in you, and I repeat with the chance priest the word that says all things: Amen.

"How cowardly it makes one to have lived, to have understood that no will power can burst the rhythm of life! Strength? It is foreseen in its measure and its direction. Not a spark of fire shall be stolen! One spark only and I should fire the world. . . . So then one must keep out of the currents, far from the lightning and look on at those who die. . . .

"And oneself. I look at myself. Ah!

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hop, frog! Thou art like the others, one of the puppets life swings on its wire!”

At that moment, Diomedes was asked by the servant to help the funeral preparations. The grief of the woman was appeased; once skimmed of its first surprise, she could be heard moaning gently to herself, without it disturbing, however, the sureness of her work. Smiling, she even excused Diomedes' clumsiness:

— Pull a little. There. . . . My mother's occupation was laying out, she used to take me with her. . . . Then I was a novice at the Sisters of Mercy. It is painful, it is sad. . . . Tomorrow I will go and fetch a sister to watch by her. Mother Sainte Praxède, if she is free. Ah, Monsieur Diomedes, for the last forty years she has laid out people, and many dead have passed through her hands. She knows what death is, to be sure; yes, she knows.

As he was leaving, going from that room in which Fanette so many times had trifled with him, or moved him by her readings,

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by her dreams, Diomedes felt in his throat the strangling of a sob.

For a long time he wept, nervously biting the fragrant hair of his little friend whose hands were crossed piously on the Book, as on a pillow of love.

## CHAPTER XIX

### LEAVES.

*Oh! how my life is shedding its leaves*

ON coming out of the cemetery, Pellegrin shook hands. Alone of men, Diomedes, the vagabond poet, and the chance priest had followed the little pauper's hearse in the shape of a coffer that white flowers made falsely virginal; all three went under the bower of green leaves where the sight of recumbent slabs vouched for the certain and dignified end of all activity and of all love.

Pellegrin, remembering a previous meeting, introduced l'Abbé Quentin as being an unparalleled priest, far superior to the clerical herd; but the priest protested, affirming himself the most modest of apostles, albeit tormented by the singular ideas of

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art, of liberty and of beauty. Turning towards Diomedes he said:

— My attitude in the presence of death may have seemed strange to you, monsieur, for it is probable that you are neither ignorant of the liturgies nor of their magic formulæ. That power, however, can exercise itself only on intelligences capable of understanding both the recited words and the intentional value of the formula. The simple words “You are saved” can save, but their strength is intellectual, not verbal. The syllables that the mind does not spiritualise are without power, either to condemn or to absolve. It is not the priest who delivers from sin, it is the sinner who frees himself by the knowledge that his bonds have been torn asunder; to that voluntary act the priest brings but the aid of his hands and the encouragement of his presence and of a tone of solemnity. The people, that is to say, all mankind, believes eternally in magic: believes that it is the words that are important; that there are in the code and in the ritual rubrics

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the recitation of which seals a marriage; that one needs a costume for killing and a costume for blessing; that a piece of stuff flying at the end of a staff is protective; that silk is to be worshipped when embroidered with the figure of a woman in white (and linen, admirable as a tricolour, is, when of one hue, nothing but a curtain); that the communion with the Infinite requires bread stamped with the seal of God; that water combined with salt is purifying, and combined with a cross, exorcising; that a bridge would collapse if its first stone were not laid with ceremonial gestures. There is religious magic, a state magic, and a popular magic. All three despise one another without understanding that they are but one and the same chameleon, varied in colours but unique in name: Faith. It is beautiful because it is cordial, human, natural and universal. Happy is he who believes! The simplicity of his soul asserts the accomplishment of his salvation, according to the modus by which he can be saved. But let that one who does not believe, act as if he

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did believe, so as not to break away from harmony and so as not to die alone on the sand like a sunfish washed up by the sea.

He spoke gently, in a slow, precise, and somewhat oratorical voice, without hesitation or pause except when intentional. Pellegrin drank in his words. Diomedes listened attentively, interested also by the wilful chin, the broad mouth, the firm nose and the arched forehead under which the eyes were fitted like precious stones in the tiara of a barbaric king.

He continued:

—One day I terrified a curate, occupied in devotions of which we could hardly justify a savage by saying to him: God is not as stupid as you think him to be. I was wrong. Intelligence and stupidity are, without doubt, forms and not degrees of the mind. The superstition which shocks us, and the act of liberty which moves us, can have equally deep or equally void meanings. . . . What do you think?

He had stopped suddenly, looking at Diomedes, who answered:

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— I think that you have just contradicted yourself and that you are aware of it.

— Yes, yes. . . . I would wish to blend contradictions, I would wish to unite faith and intelligence.

— In disclaiming intelligence!

— No, I have spoken nonsense. . . .  
And yet?

— It is not nonsense, resumed Diomedes; it is one way of looking at things and quite tenable, for intelligence is a ladder and stupidity is a wheelbarrow. . . .

Pellegrin began to laugh:

— My dear Diomedes, if you interweave metaphors in a philosophical discussion, night will fall, a night thronged with dreams. . . .

— A night thronged with dreams. . . .  
That, that is truly the semblance of my life.

— And of all lives, resumed l'Abbé Quentin. As soon as a brain wishes to think, twilight descends on it. One seeks, amidst the darkness, one's fallen keys.

— Yes, said Diomedes, you would wish to open the door of the chamber in which



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Truth contemplates herself eternally, in several mirrors hung upon the walls. She smiles at herself and trifles with her companions whom she despises, for she is Truth. . . . Have you read Palafox? You must read Palafox.

— You drive me back towards magic, monsieur, answered the priest, who thought he perceived a raillery. But I know what I want. I want to help men to suffer and I will help them to unburden themselves of suffering. That is why I spoke to your dying friend the words that you heard.

— But that was magic, that also; it was a conjuration.

— No, it was the encouragement of a soul to a soul. Was I right?

— Your little poem was agreeable, monsieur, answered Diomedes, but less so than the words of the liturgy. And precisely in that, it seemed to me that you exiled yourself from harmony. Think that, of these words, many doubtless are older than all known religions, very old stammerings of the primitive terror! That which you

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disdainfully qualify as formula is really verbal beauty crystallised in the memory of the centuries. There are in the Zend-Avesta a few sentences that could still console me and bless my life and my bread; but they are unused and perhaps ineffectual.

— Words have their magic, monsieur, I very sincerely believe that some verses of Virgil have produced incantations.

The priest seemed to pursue some inward discourse.

He uttered with an inspired look:

— God and life. . . . Life within God, serious, cordial, rich with love and joys. . . . It is death that made me love life. It is through seeing death that I came to understand how solemn life is and how happy it should be, to justify death. Having known injustice, I believed in the Infinite where all is annulled and in the supremacy of God who is infinite pain and the absolute of our sufferings. God suffers from not being able to know himself and we suffer from not being able to know God.

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Let us love God, and we shall know him; let us go to his rescue; beloved of men, he will know himself in the love of men and all life of suffering shall cease and all souls, human souls and the divine soul, shall be beatified in the Infinite. The creation of life is the means of salvation that God in the beginning of centuries chose for himself; it is the mirror in which he wished to see himself, but the wickedness of mankind obscured the face of the earth. And in face of death, I dream of the uselessness of suffering and of all these anguished lives, eternally sacrificed. I await the reign of Love. And when a soul is severed from the life of flesh, it goes in the peaceful darkness to await the reign of Love. It suffers not, it waits — and not in vain.

Diomedes praised such sentiments, finding, however, this theology somewhat curious. Secretly he regarded the ecclesiastic as rather incoherent, and would have preferred a country curate capable of playing bowls.

Then:

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“A bad tempered opinion. . . . What a disparaging mind I have!”

Then:

“Still another day during which I shall have thought very little of myself. . . . A letter from Néo surely awaits me. Also, I must take away my portrait and those of Fanette before the advent of stupid heirs. . . . The reign of Love. Fanette was that — rather. Poor child!”

Abruptly, he deserted Pellegrin and the priest: after a few steps, he repented:

— I should have kept Pellegrin. I shall bore myself to tears.

He came back; they had gone.

“Oh, how my life is shedding its leaves!”

He did not dare go back to Fanette’s apartment, to see once more the forlornness of the bed and that arm-chair in which the Sister of Mercy seemed to have seated herself for all eternity.

Where could such vocations be recruited for, he mused. What horn, sounding in the night, could be loud enough to call together a herd of such woeful women?

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To give the whole of one's life up to death, to have no other care than the dressing of corpses, the solitary vigil near rigid bodies and cold faces where the shadow of the nostrils marks an immutable hour on the putrefaction of the cheek!

These creatures chose such a painful task probably from several motives: Firstly, it was necessary and traditional, inherited from the ancient mortuary corporations whose pious spade had dug so many catacombs. Then Diomedes admitted the imperative need for salvation which inclines beings either towards sacrifice or towards crime, if, as with the Mussulmans, crime is one of the paths to Paradise. But the especial reason of such a choice was vocation the instinctive marching at the call of the horn, the absurd human tendency to obey the Voices. . . .

“These Sisters and the men who live similarly on death are the coleopterous beetles of humanity. Their destiny is insuperable. Their nerves thrill at the perfumes of decay as other nerves thrill at all

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the perfumes of life, and, as l'Abbé Quentin said, it is beautiful because it is cordial and human. . . .”

Pondering over men and women living thus without corporal communion, in colonies of a single sex, Diomedes succeeded at last in understanding: being of different sexes, their derma recoiled being of the same sex they attracted each other but chastely, as the motive of such an exile was precisely sexual inaptitude.

“Chastity is by no means the necessary companion of intelligence, and yet it is perhaps one of intelligence's least equivocal friends. The principal pleasure of that state being the total absence of sentimentalism, a state upon which souls freed from vice can glorify themselves. Vice is sentimental and perhaps that alone makes its ugliness.”

Then Diomedes judged himself with severity, ashamed of having neglected ideas for sentiments, of having accomplished acts of love in which he had woven that sort of pity that women wish to contemplate

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on bended knees before the altar of their grace. He resolved, without neglecting any of the social attentions that his attitude towards Néobelle rendered necessary, to treat her only as an intellectual animal without other surrenderings than those of the flesh and of the mind.

Yet almost immediately he thought himself stupid:

“Thus I should be the dupe of my principles and I would suffer that concern for what is logical should dictate my conduct? No! I shall contradict myself if I please. Besides which, I must experience every sentiment as well as every sensation. Nothing must surprise me, but nothing must be indifferent to me. To set the sail and await the wind’s pleasure and if it heads me towards a reef and towards a shipwreck, I shall still be superior to those who have never sailed but on the saddened waters of canals choked with dead leaves.”

## CHAPTER XX

### CLOUDS

*Beams of light are passing, clouds are passing,  
There are arabesques on the walls*

WHAT, said Cyrène, you have let Néo go away?

— She is free.

— Then she loves you no more?

— I do not know.

— And you?

— I do not know.

— You are free.

— I hope so.

— I mean free not to answer me.

— But I know nothing really, my friend, resumed Diomedes, very gently. Of Néo, nothing. Of myself, nothing. I never know anything of myself. Beams of light are passing, clouds are passing, there are arabesques on the walls, small faces are



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outlined, grow, burst, die. . . . I have forgotten what their eyes said, and, if the wall becomes luminous again, I ignore what they will say or whether they will wish to speak once more. Truly, Cyrène, if Néo wished, as women would express it, to subject me to a test, she mistook the man; her absence causes me no torment. If our meeting is to have social consequences, I accept them without displeasure, that is all. If circumstances are such that I seem to have acted according to an egoism wantonly termed criminal, I still accept. At last, I am in her hands. I had every reason to fear her, since I loved her. One should never remove the draperies of the statue one adores, or of the woman one loves: the hangings drop like a trap-door.

— She is your mistress?

— You knew it, Cyrène, and it was the sole motive of your questions.

— I knew it.

— She wrote to you?

— No. A confidence before leaving.

— Surprised?

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— Who?

— You.

— Hardly.

— Of course.

— Don't abuse me, Diomedes, because after all, at this hour, I might abuse you in return.

— Hardly. Besides which, both sorts are hypocritical and quite allowed. . . . We don't believe in them. As in us there is nothing social, we can smile at each other without bitterness.

— Nothing social? In us, perhaps, but the question is Néo. How little you can love her, knowing her so badly. She is almost as unknown to you as to herself. And yet you have sapped her will, slowly, day by day, and your ideas have become the motives of the actions of that passionate intelligence. Reserved and ironical, Néo had always seemed to me heedless of sentimentalities, the creature made to stand erect, the woman the least doomed to an abrupt alcove adventure. If she did give herself, it was out of literary pleasure, out

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of curiosity of mind, to assert her right of action, to the gesture of freedom—to astonish you, my dear, and not to please you. I am therefore angry with you for having only conquered her intellectual vanity. . . .

—How do you know?

—She is to marry Lord Grouchy in a fortnight.

—Ah!

—That is all? But go after her! Let her see you and she will follow you.

—Cyrène, how melodramatic you are!  
Seventh tableau: Flowerbury Manor.

—What, you knew where she is, and you stayed in Paris playing at being the friend of little courtesans!

—Pellegrin has told you of Fanette's death? It was edifying and it grieved me. As to Néo, if I know her but ill; she is hardly ingorant of my character, for she told me of her departure knowing quite well that no whim would induce me to go on a steamer. I shall not go to Flowerbury. Ah! She is going to marry? I think it is

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vulgar, that is all. The act is ugly, like an untruth . . . temporary opinion. . . . I will reflect on this. There is much to be reflected on. Abundant meditations. . . . Pleasant afternoons, under the trees at the Luxembourg, amongst the children, the ducks and the playing waters. . . . Shall we go?

— No. I also, I wish to reflect. My life is being troubled and my heart hardened. . . . From hour to hour, I wish for fewer things and the wishes that I realise give me each time diminished joys. I had so hoped to see you marry Néo and live with her and me, and us, the broad life of an ironic philosopher. You two, I and Cyran, it was a world in four personages; from the height of our planet, we would have judged mankind with amiable and almost divine disdain: Cyran everlasting dreams, I everlasting heart, Néo everlasting mind and you everlasting soul and bond of the other souls. . . . It would have lasted but a few years, yes, I know: Cyran has let himself grow old, his fate lies in wait for me. . . . But we

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should have lived in you beyond the grave. . . . Absurd, is it not? Everything is absurd, except sensation. I believe men will become animals, once more. . . . Finally, I renounce Cyran. Ha! Diomedes, the little sentimental bourgeoisie, she is fading, she is becoming obsolete, she is going, she is going. . . .

Diomedes scarcely answered. Yet, satisfied that she should turn away from Cyran, he delicately praised such a sacrifice. Then:

— It is necessary that he should die alone, as he wishes to, with fear, but in beauty. What could you have given him? Not even a companion. Images guard the door of his cell and let nothing pass but what is incorporeal. Leave him, and let us love him as he is, old with his young dream. So then?

— I still have this, said Cyrène, crushing her bosom, my body, the mother-of-pearl case.

Diomedes seemed so uninterested that Cyrène ceased talking, as well as crushing her complacent breast. Perhaps she would

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wish to substitute an hour of love to the stroll they were to take? He feared it.

But that fear was reflected in his pulses and he realised that a temptation, even a commonplace one, might overthrow the most decided scruples. So as to benefit by experience, he wished himself the woman before the adoring male, the virtuous woman who will neither fall nor flee. In that psychological state, he wished to hear things of love and then to answer by disconcerting laughter, and yet he must start the game. He said absent-mindedly:

— The mother of pearl case, the mother of pearl case!

Cyrène was surprised. Emotion was written in blushes on her pale cheeks. She had perceived no shade of doubt in Diomedes' exclamation, she thought therefore the words “mother of pearl case” had evoked in him a sensual image. By a revulsion of thought, she saw her own body. She thought it necessary to be explanatory:

— My dear, I have not changed at all

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since I was yours, slightly heavier, my figure is the same.

“If I do not make love to her,” mused Diomedes, “she will think herself despised, and because of her age she will suffer despite the certitude that so many young men give her. Being further advanced on the pathway, I am more difficult to tempt, especially by a fruit whose flavour is known to me. . . . O God, how disinclined I am to rejoice with Cyrène!”

He came nearer, took her hands, but Cyrène, made happy by his gesture, drew back:

— No, no, my dear, Néo is perhaps thinking of you at this moment. Adieu.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THOUGHTS

*Thoughts are made to be thought  
and not to be acted*

“Flowerbury Manor, Saturday.

**D**EAREST DIO,

“You shall know the whole tragedy  
of my love.

“I was so free, so completely mistress of my acts that my father never dared deny me the right to even one of my wishes. He let me go out one evening with you, but he waited my return, sad and suspicious, and told me his resolution to take me to Flowerbury the very next day. I knew. I was expecting that. Marriage, to a girl, is a second first communion, and nothing more; the act is the same, albeit less pure and, humanly, more significant; its consequences, all of a material order, are vulgar and traditional.



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“Its mysteries could no longer move me; Lord Grouchy displayed a discreet satisfaction, such as at killing a wild goose or at tasting the pureness of some old brandy of France, discovered amidst the dust of the cellars. He confided in me sufficiently to unveil his tastes; he is not hypocritical, he desires a male heir of his flesh and blood. May God satisfy him; truth is that which one believes — according to your precepts, Diomedes, — but I, I shall read the soul of the father in the eyes of the son.

“You remember, my friend, the letter that you were not capable of reading even through the envelope. Re-read it. It will seem clear to you, now, if you see, at the word lover, that from that time on I should consider myself as married. A purely legal operation, and the most usual formula for the transmission of property; a social custom of which I only suffered the shadow, smiling! I smiled at cheating society, the world and all the dupes of the game; I smile at you from over the seas, my exquisite accomplice!

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“Dio, it is now that I love you:

“I love you, Dio! You have made me so different from other women! I feel as if an eagle had swept on to the summit of a forest, amongst the leaves, in the house of the wind; it is there that I live and it is there that I think of you, whilst under the branches, which brush human heads, beings rejoice at the solidity of their limbs and the power of their backs. I, I lift myself up to your brow and I explore the kingdom of your thoughts, and I realise your discourses by the beauty of my attitudes.

“I gave myself to you, to be worthy of you, and with so little love when doing so that I was perhaps unseemly during the sacrifice. One must love to surrender oneself gracefully. But now, in this hour, filled with harmony, I would find the joy which lost itself in my flesh, and our eyes would be of the same radiant hue.

“Await me. . . .

BELLE.”

“A letter interrupted by the return of the hounds,” mused Diomedes, coldly. “But

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I did not anticipate such poetical enthusiasm. It no longer interests me. Where falsehood has passed, I will not tread. There are fresh grasses. I will go beside the stream, in the field, amongst the flowering rushes, and I will strip the reeds to see the whiteness of their pith shiver between my fingers. I shall love genuine souls, unconstrained, verdant and innocent as are the rushes of the fields. . . .

“I was mistaken. One cannot say anything in this life that does not fall into blundering ears, and beings hasten to travesty your thoughts into acts. Thoughts are made to be thought and not to be acted. Action, thou art not the sister, thou art the daughter of the dream, its ridiculous and misshapen daughter. Action, abstain from listening outside the doors of the brain, find in thyself, if thou art capable thereof, thy motive and thy justification.

Be barren, O Thought! Do not release until dried by irony thy pestilential grains. Be a manure but not a seed. However, if

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the dung heap should blossom, resign thyself to poisoning the world. Thy perfume will carry women to the sphere of the bloodstained males, and thy beauty will smile in the locks which are adorned for lust. One must be silent. As soon as the mouth is opened, arrows fly, burst forth carrying words, penetrate the limbs forcing them into movement. Thought writhes in dances and gestures; it lies to itself, it denies itself in becoming a principle of strength, that is to say, unconscious and stupid. The chance priest was right: stupidity is one of the forms of intelligence; it is intelligence become action: it is the phrase of Beethoven become the hand evoking a vulgar gesture; it is the idea of the liberty of the sexes become the motive of turpitude.

“All idea which realizes itself, realizes itself ugly or null. One must separate the two domains: instinct shall guide acts, and thought, liberated from the dread of base deformations, will bloom free and alone, following the vast beauty of its unlimited nature.

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“The thought should not be acted; the act should not be thought.

“When I think my actions, I despise them still more; isolated in their own groove, they would perhaps be innocent as thoughts are innocent. Some acts, very few! none of mine, can, like white lambs, enter the close of innocent thoughts. . . .

“How vulgar Néo was! ‘I realise your discourses by the beauty of my attitudes,’ Oh, stupidity! Néo, you realised the discourses which penetrated your ears and not those which came from my lips.

“‘Exquisite accomplice!’ That is better and it is true. I shall answer her. Can I abuse a woman because she forgot to elucidate an obscure moment of the metaphysics of ideas? Exquisite accomplice, you shall come here again, your bare feet shall again be pale flowers on the blue carpet and I shall see you once more as an eternal statute laid on a tombstone. . . . I fear you no longer, I know that your love is but a desire to astonish me ‘by the beauty of your attitudes.’ And when

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your hazel eyes wish to smile. I shall be happy. . . .”

Diomedes went out, wishing to calm himself by an indifferent spectacle.

In the Champs Elysées he met Cyrène in her landau, with Elian and Flavie, pink cheeked and laughing. She was scolding them like lapdogs, and giving them sweets to eat.

Further on under the trees, Pascase and Christine were walking hastily with a somewhat vacant gaze: Diomedes thought he saw a violent man driving them away with a whip.

“Charming shadows!”

A carriage passed quickly in which a woman was weeping: he recognised Mauve, also Tanche, who as he leant over her, seemed to be consoling; the carriage brushed past a Sister of Mercy who slipped in moving back. Diomedes held out his hands but the nun rose unaided, straightened her veils and, without any expression passing over her waxlike, harsh, flat, dejected face, said looking at the already distant carriage

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and sniffing like some animal: “I can smell death.”

She elbowed her way through the crowd.

— Let the good Sister of Mercy pass, said a priest, bowing to the nun, who disappeared, followed by fearing eyes.

— You will see her again, resumed l’Abbé Quentin, addressing Diomedes. But fear her, she is an omen.

At the café, waiting for Cyran, Diomedes read the last dispatches in the evening papers:

“Jerusalem, midday. Have registered, at the hotel of the Golgotha: . . .”

“Another idea which realised itself badly or an act misshapen by thought to such an extent that even a priest knows its history no longer. . . .”

“ . . . Golgotha: the Countess Ephrem de Sina. . . .”

Further:

“Death of M. Cyran. . . . He was found dead, paint-brush in hand, at the feet of the lamb which seemed to watch over him. . . .”/

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In the midst of his grief, Diomedes mused:

“The journalist has completed Cyran’s sentence. To live is to complete a sentence begun by another, but the one begun by you, another will complete. And thus it goes on towards the infinite, following a curve whose beauty we do not fully comprehend . . .”

Then again:

“I will adopt Lamb. According to Cyran’s wish, I shall make a ram of him to perpetuate his race, without perpetuating the thought which corrupts the races and destroys the harmony of unity. Lamb is a being whose acts will always be pure, since their rhythm cannot be troubled by any scruple. It is the distorting thought that makes evil, with all its temptations, its labyrinths, whence none can escape except maimed in the struggle and fevered by intellectual anguish!

“Cyran has died from having wished to write ideas on the walls of a chapel; the walls rejected the writing; spurned by the



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stone, the ideas like spears, have pierced Cyran's heart.

“Be cursed, O Thought! creator of all things, but deadly creator,—clumsy mother who hast never given birth save to beings whose shoulders are the stepladder of chance and whose eyes are the laughing-stock of life.”

THE END.







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